

Alcohol and flying/unruly passengers

NordAN's additional aspects for IATA alcohol policies. Feedback from NordAN Riga conference (October 11-12).

- 1. Not only safety issue.** Drinking onboard or being intoxicated decreases the safety of the passengers and the whole flight. Safety is still not the only problem as drunken behaviour and even mere public drinking can disturb other people among whom are also children. Harm to others from drinking, or we may call it also passive drinking, affects people on different levels. In a closed environment like aircraft, the behaviour of persons who have been drinking and/or are intoxicated may interfere other peoples rights and personal space. Loud voices and indecent manners can and mostly do disturb also those passengers to whom these behaviours are not directed to.
- 2. Children should have the priority.** Even though children and young people do not fly very often, they should be seen as a priority target group. Place where children can be as well as adults, should prioritise the rights of children and their well-being. According to WHO European Alcohol Charter "*All children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages*". With all the best intentions, if there is a drunken person on board, flight crew cannot guarantee that right for children who are also present. When a family is travelling with children and a person sitting next to children is drinking alcohol, even without any disturbance, that might violate the rights of that family to keep their children away from the context of drinking. With such scenario, flying is one of very unique occasions where families are put into situations like that.
- 3. Magnitude of the problem.** It appears that only most severe cases are recorded. In our opinion this available data does not show the full spectrum of the problem related to alcohol use. Less apparent incidents are not recorded but they still decrease the safety and flight satisfaction for other passengers. Although people in the western societies are used to alcohol related problems and they may not complain when they are affected, it still bothers them.
- 4. Solidarity with alcoholics.** In western societies where majority of people are drinking alcohol, there is a considerable number of people who are addicted to alcohol and for them being in situations where neighbour is drinking or he/she is offered free alcohol may trigger a possible relapse. Again, this harm will mostly stay unrecorded but should still be considered.
- 5. Customers rights.** Flying is not cheap. People are paying a lot to get home from business trip or going for a vacation or back home. Some are paying even more for 1st class either to increase the comfort level or for additional personal space. While it is obvious that their flight ticket doesn't guarantee 100% privacy (there could be a crying baby, very big neighbour or a person with possible health problems) shouldn't it be again a priority to prevent avoidable possibilities that someone's behaviour puts others rights at risk? Drinking mind altering substance like alcohol should be one of these avoidable risk factors.

6. Business class and free alcohol. Most airlines who serve free alcohol do that in the 1 class. Most 1 class passengers are flying on business reasons among them also politicians who are paid by public money. Why should employers pay for free alcohol?

7. Awareness of alcohols influence. Surveys show that despite available scientific evidence many people are unaware of the risks related to alcohol use eg alcohols carcinogenic effects, alcohols teratogenic effects etc. It is probable that many people are also ignorant concerning the special effect of alcohol in a flight altitude. Changes in air pressure, fatigue from flying, and especially dehydration all cause alcohol to be more potent than usual. With less water in the body, the effect of alcohol will be stronger, leading to quicker intoxication and increased potential for a hangover.

8. Role of the hospitality sector at the airports. It seems to be clear that many passengers are entering the aircraft already drunk and that the problem starts at the airport cafe, pub or restaurant. It is important that these hospitality businesses realise their responsibilities and increase their level of control. But it seems to be obvious that solving this problem focusing on bars and pubs is problematic because their core business is selling alcohol, among others products. Core business of airlines is transportation and it seems to be more logical to approach the problem from their jurisdiction. If airline companies would change their alcohol policies and prohibit entrance for intoxicated persons, that would force also airports and hospitality providers change their policies.

9. Alcohol free white zone. There are areas and contexts in our everyday life which are considered to be alcohol-free white zones, whether it is the work environment, traffic or pregnancy – we don't see any place for alcohol there. These white zones have been established in time and they grow with knowledge. Borrowing an example from tobacco policies, it was only recently when smoking at a restaurant or a cafe was considered to be normal, disturbing for some, but generally normal. Most European countries have ratified by now a law prohibiting smoking from bars and restaurants creating thus another white zone. In our opinion, when these arguments are taken aboard, flying context should be also an alcohol-free white zone.

October 2014

Nordic Alcohol and Drug Policy Network (NordAN)

Lauri Beekmann

beekmann@nordan.org