

PUBLIC JUSTICE



AMERICA'S PUBLIC INTEREST LAW FIRM

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2009

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PUBLIC JUSTICE JOINS FIGHT TO SAVE AIRLINE PASSENGERS AND CREW MEMBERS FROM TOXIC 'BLEED AIR' EXPOSURE

Public Justice, a national public interest law firm headquartered in Washington DC, has joined a lawsuit in Washington state on behalf of a flight attendant who suffered serious permanent injuries from breathing toxic "bleed air" – engine oil fumes emitted from a defectively designed aircraft.

The lawsuit was filed in April on behalf of former flight attendant Terry Williams, 38, of Pierce County, Wash., against both McDonnell Douglas Corporation, which designed and manufactured the aircraft involved in the case, and The Boeing Company, McDonnell's parent.

Ms. Williams worked as a flight attendant for seventeen years, until she suffered debilitating injuries that her doctors have determined were a result of being exposed to contaminated bleed air.

"Public Justice is joining this case because toxic bleed air is a problem of national importance," said Leslie Brueckner, the lead Public Justice attorney on the case. "One of Public Justice's core missions is to use damage litigation to compensate victims of corporate misconduct. Success in this case will also create a financial incentive for Boeing to get the poison out of the air breathed by its passengers and crew members."

Most commercial passenger aircraft provide breathable air to passengers by means of ventilation systems that "bleed" air off the engines: outside air is drawn in through the engines and then cooled and routed to the cabin and flight deck. Because of their defective design, these ventilation systems often permit toxic chemicals from engine oil and hydraulic lubrication products to contaminate the air supply. These chemicals include organophosphates, toxins that were once commonly used in pesticides and insecticides but have now been banned in most states. Individuals, like Ms. Williams, who are exposed to these toxins may suffer dizziness, fatigue, respiratory diseases, bronchial spasms, headaches, impairments in cognitive functioning and speech, large black spots in their vision, numbness and tingling in their hands and feet, rashes, and uncontrolled tremors.

"The problem of toxic 'bleed air' on airplanes has been known to the airline industry since the 1950s. The aircraft manufacturers have turned a blind eye to this problem and failed to equip

their planes with sensors or filters to keep toxic chemicals out of the cabin,” said Alisa Brodkowitz of Seattle, an aviation attorney and Public Justice lead cooperating counsel for Ms. Williams. “The only things ‘filtering’ this stuff out of the cabin are the lungs of passengers and crew members.”

While it is unclear how often cabin air becomes contaminated with organophosphates, a 2008 article co-authored by the director of flight safety for the International Association of Machinists and an industrial hygienist found that, over an 18-month period, a “bleed air fume event” occurred almost once per day in the United States. Other data suggest that there are at least 950 bleed air fume events per year in this country alone.

In addition to Brueckner and Brodkowitz, Terry Williams is represented by Public Justice cooperating counsel Michael Withey of Seattle, Wash., and Ted Leopold of Leopold~Kubin in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and Public Justice’s Melanie Hirsch.

Read the complaint for *Williams v. McDonnell Douglas Corp.* on the Public Justice website at <http://www.publicjustice.net/Repository/Files/Williams%20Conformed%20Complaint.pdf>.

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Public Justice is America’s public interest law firm. Dedicated to using trial lawyers’ and other attorneys’ skills and resources to advance the public good, Public Justice is supported by--and can call on--a nationwide network of more than 3,000 of the nation’s top lawyers to pursue precedent-setting and socially significant litigation. It has a wide-ranging litigation docket in the areas of consumer rights, worker safety, civil rights and liberties, toxic torts, environmental protection, and access to the courts.

Public Justice is the principal project of The Public Justice Foundation, a not-for-profit membership organization headquartered in Washington, DC, with a West Coast office in Oakland, California. Our Washington state coordinators are Brad J. Moore, (206) 448-1777, and Jeffrey L. Needle, (206) 447-1560. The Public Justice web site address is <http://www.publicjustice.net>.