

September 23, 2009

I have exciting news to share. **This week, we joined a groundbreaking lawsuit filed 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 into the plane's air supply. This is one of the first such cases in the country, and it could have huge implications for public health and safety.**



The lawsuit was filed 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. She can no longer work or care for her children.

Success in this case will do more than compensate Terry Williams for her injuries -- it could also create a financial incentive for airlines to stop exposing their passengers and crew to toxic air.

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 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, 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, Wash., 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 1998 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.

To read the complaint in *Williams v. McDonnell Douglas Corp.*, [click here](#).

In addition to Brodkowitz, Terry Williams is represented by Public Justice cooperating counsel

Michael Withey of Seattle, Wash., Ted Leopold of Leopold~Kivin in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and Public Justice's Leslie Brueckner and Melanie Hirsch.

Thanks for your interest, dedication, and support. Keep fighting! - Arthur .

Arthur Bryant
Executive Director
Public Justice
& the Public Justice Foundation

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