

Feds Release Flight-Related Incident Data

One cat died and another escaped, but was rescued, during U.S. flights in March.

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Federal law requires U.S. airlines to report to the Department of Transportation all incidents involving the loss, injury or death of animals during transportation. One pet cat died suddenly and another was injured during separate flights about a week apart on U.S.-originating flights in March 2007, according to a new U.S. Department of Transportation report released last week.

The most recent incident occurred March 28 when a traveler flying aboard a Continental Airlines flight from Seattle, Wash., to Anchorage, Alaska, checked two tabby cats in separate kennels for the journey.

Upon arrival, one of the cats, a 14-year-old male American Shorthair, was found to be deceased in his crate. According to the airline, the customer refused to allow a necropsy to be performed and had stated the cat was already being treated for cardiomyopathy.

The airline ruled that the death was not transit related. The traveler, according to the airline, agreed that Continental was not responsible for the death of the animal, because of the age and pre-existing condition of the cat.

The other incident occurred March 20 aboard a Northwest Airlines flight from Los Angeles to Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport in Minnesota. According to the airline, a cat that had been checked as baggage escaped its kennel during transit.

The cause, according to the airline, is believed to have been due to the cat being accepted in a collapsible kennel, which is contrary to Northwest Airlines' policy. The top of the kennel was open on arrival and no secondary kennel door ties were present.

After the cat's escape was discovered, it was easily caught and placed in a loaner kennel, according to the airline. The cat had a scratch on its face, but recovered from this minor injury.

After the incident, pet acceptance procedures and acceptable kennel standards were reviewed at L.A. airport staff meetings with front-line agents, Northwest Airlines said.

Federal law requires U.S. airlines to report to the Department of Transportation all incidents involving the loss, injury or death of animals during transportation. So far in 2007, there have been six pet-related incidents, according to the DOT: three in March, two in February and one in January.

There were a total of 26 animal fatalities – mostly dogs – before, during and after air transport in 2006. There were also 11 animals injured and 12 animals lost at U.S. airports last year, according to DOT statistics.