PET
TRANSPORT

By Kim Cunningham, Communication Director, International Pet and Animal Transportation Association (IPATA)
The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) is proposing to amend its existing rule regarding the reporting of incidents involving animals during air transport.

Currently, an air carrier that provides scheduled passenger air transportation must simply submit a monthly report to the Secretary of Transportation listing any incidents involving the loss, injury, or death of an animal during air transport provided by the air carrier.

In August 2010, Senators Richard Durbin, Robert Menendez, and Joseph Lieberman contacted the Secretary of Transportation urging the DOT to amend its rule so that airlines would be required to report all incidents involving the loss, injury, or death of cats and dogs that occur while they are traveling in an airline’s care, custody, or control, regardless of whether the cat or dog is being transported as a pet by its owner or as part of a commercial shipment.

The DOT would like to increase the number of airline carriers required to report the loss, injury, or death of an animal. Currently, only 15 U.S. airlines report these incidents, but the proposed rule would require reporting by all U.S. airlines that operate scheduled service with at least one aircraft of more than 60 seats.

The proposal also hopes to expand the definition of “animal” to include all cats and dogs transported by the carrier, including those being transported as part of a commercial shipment. Currently, airlines are required to report only those incidents involving pets being transported by their owners.

Finally, the proposed rule would require each air carrier to provide in its December report a summary of the total number of animal losses, injuries and deaths as well as the total number of animals transported that calendar year.

The International Pet and Animal Transportation Association (IPATA) believes this is the most important of the proposed changes and urges the DOT to require reporting of the total number of animals transported, even if the carrier had no animal-related incidents during the year. Right now, carriers are required to file monthly reports only if they experience the death, injury or loss of a pet, and they do not provide the number of animals carried.

IPATA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the care and welfare of pets and animals during transport, applauds the DOT for its proposal to expand reporting of incidents involving animals during air transport to include more airlines and an expanded definition to include all dogs and cats and not just family pets.

“But airlines must publish the total number of animals transported each year,” says Sally Smith, IPATA’s President. “It is imperative for consumers to know how many total animals are transported by an airline in order to see that the number of incidents is actually quite small. Animal transport is extremely safe and, while one incident is one incident too many, when compared to the enormous volume of animals transported, it is extremely low.”

The additional requirement of reporting the number of animals transported will be important for providing a complete picture of a carrier’s animal transport record, as the number of animals transported by each airline may vary widely. According to a DOT press release, if the agency were to gather this data from the airlines, they would use it to calculate rates of animal loss, injury and death per unit of animals transported for each airline (e.g., 1.04 deaths per 10,000 animals transported) and include this information in published animal incident reports. Without this information, consumers and others will not be able to compare the rate of animal incidents from one carrier to another or one year to another.

In 2011, airlines reported 35 deaths, nine injuries and two lost animals. The DOT has even acknowledged that this is a small percentage of the total pets transported on planes.

The DOT has found that "short-faced" dog breeds such as pugs and bulldogs, represent about half of the dogs that die while being transported by their owners as cargo, a significantly higher rate of mortality than for other dog breeds.

The DOT has finished collecting public comments and will make its decision based upon this feedback.