



SICK FROM POOR AIRCRAFT AIR QUALITY?  
**REPORT IT – EVEN IF YOU THINK YOU'LL BE BETTER SOON**  
 AND CALL AFA-CWA FOR HELP

Many different types of chemicals can contaminate the cabin air, including exhaust fumes, deicing fluid, electrical fumes, and jet fuel. All of these can make you sick. AFA-CWA is especially concerned if the air was contaminated with heated oil or hydraulic fluid. Oil fumes are often described as smelling like **dirty socks**. In some cases, crewmembers do not remember seeing or smelling anything unusual during a flight, although they report **symptoms consistent with exposure** to carbon monoxide gas and neurotoxic chemicals, and aircraft records confirm that oil or hydraulic fluid entered the air supply. Many symptoms that you may experience are not specific to contaminated bleed air. For example, you may have difficulty breathing due to insufficient oxygen or exposure to ozone gas.

If you feel that you may be suffering from symptoms due to exposure to chemical fumes supplied to the aircraft cabin through the air supply vents, the best thing you can do for yourself is document it. Don't just figure you'll likely feel better soon so there is no need to report anything. **If your health problems persist or return after another incident, the paper trail will be critical. Start by contacting your AFA-CWA LEC Safety, Health, and Security Chair.**

If you have **symptoms that are visible, have somebody take photos or video** as soon as possible. It will help to establish the cause-effect relationship that you want to prove. Symptoms such as stomach cramping, fatigue, muscle pain, and confusion are not visible, but can be documented by a doctor. Video may be helpful for recording some symptoms, such as tremors or speech issues. In some cases, neurological symptoms may develop during the weeks after an exposure.

It is very important that you **see a doctor as soon as possible** to document your symptoms. Do not just go home. Get medical attention. It is *especially* important to have everything documented to protect yourself if your symptoms get worse. If you think that you were **exposed to heated oil or hydraulic fluids** on board the aircraft, read and print the information from the AFA-CWA Air Safety, Health, & Security website: <http://ashsd.afacwa.org/docs/practical.htm>. Describe to your doctor the cabin conditions and your symptoms, both during the flight and since the flight. Bring the relevant product safety data sheet and Health Care Providers' Guide (posted on that same AFA-CWA webpage) to all medical appointments.

Whenever possible, **have your doctor perform objective tests** to document your condition. There is currently no blood test that will confirm that you breathed engine oil or hydraulic fumes, so your description of the cabin conditions and your symptoms are especially important. Some medical tests may be useful for assessing symptoms. For example, if you have respiratory complaints, a lung function test may document any reduced breathing capacity. Nerve conduction velocity tests may be used to confirm nerve damage. If you are dizzy or faint, you may have been exposed to carbon monoxide and a blood oxygen hemoglobin test may be appropriate, although blood must be drawn within a few hours of exposure, and within one hour of exposure if you went on oxygen during the flight. Also, oil and hydraulic fluid fumes don't always contain carbon monoxide; it will depend on the temperature to which the oil/hydraulic fluid was heated in the engine/APU.

**File a report with the company promptly.** Note the date, flight number and plane number. Describe the working conditions. Did you notice an odor or visible mist/haze/smoke? Were you aware of any mechanical problems? During what phase of flight did you develop symptoms? Was this the first time? Send a copy to your AFA-CWA LEC Safety, Health, & Security Chair.

**Keep a copy of everything** – every medical record, report, photo, and a record of all phone conversations (names, dates, and a short summary). If you have to mail anything, send it by certified mail with a return receipt. Reporting to the company is a priority, but to advocate on your behalf, **AFA-CWA also needs to know about your incident.** For more information, contact Judith Anderson at AFA-CWA's Air Safety, Health & Security Dept. Seattle field office (206-932-6237 or [judith@AFAnet.org](mailto:judith@AFAnet.org)).