AMC 101454

NOV 22 2002

NOV 2002

234675

As. 60 FAA-02-13464-41

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION DOCKETS

11/11/02

FAA

03 FEB 28 AM 9:55

SUBJECT: FAA Proposal To Improve Safety of Airline Seats (Receiving Public Comments Until 12/3/02)

In 1990 or 1991 I sent a recommendation to either FAA or the National Transportation Safety Board requesting the standarization of seat-belt installation. I am not sure if this suggestion was ever considered or read as I never received a response.

Nevertheless, as a survivor of an airplane crash which killed 130 passengers (727 in Honduras on 10/21/89) I know first hand how important it is to be able to quickly extricate oneself from an aircraft that has crashed and especially one that is or will shortly be engulfed in flames.

For a long time I was unable to understand why I could not quickly release my seat belt after the crash. It was a few years later while again flying on commercial airlines that I noticed that some seat belts were installed with right-hand releases and others with left-hand releases.

I am right dominant and automatically used my right-hand to release my seatbelt. I was stunned from the impact of the crash and was not thinking clearly and just naturally relied on my right-hand to release the seatbelt mechanism. I must have spent 15-20 seconds desparately trying to release the latch with my right-hand before trying with my left-hand. Pulling with my left hand released the latch and enabled me to work my way out of the fuselage before it was completely engulfed in flames. As it was I sustained burns (2nd & 3rd degree) over 50 percent of my body.

I am certain that those 15-20 seconds trying to get my seatbelt latch to release was a major factor for the severity of my burns. I am also certain that others probably survived the impact, but died because they could not release themselves from their seats.

I am pleased to hear that the FAA is addressing the issue of improving the safety of commercial airline seats. As part of this effort I would recommend that:

1) The design of airline seatbelt latch mechanisms be reviewed and changed so that each restraining latch mechanism can be opened (released) by either a left-hand or right-hand pull;

2) If a multi-release latch mechanism (#1) cannot be invented, then airlines should be required to standardized the installation of seat-belts to insure all are right-hand pull release to minimize the number of release failures (I.E. - I believe there are more right dominant people than left dominant) and require airlines to inform passengers of the fact that the seatbelt latch is right-handed release;

3) If #1 & #2 are not workable, then require airlines to inform passengers of the fact that seat-belt mechanisms can be either a right-handed or left-handed pull and that each passenger should check to see what their particular situation is.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Eugene J Van Dyke

EUGENE VAN DYK
P.O. Box 1495
EL GRANADA, CA
94018