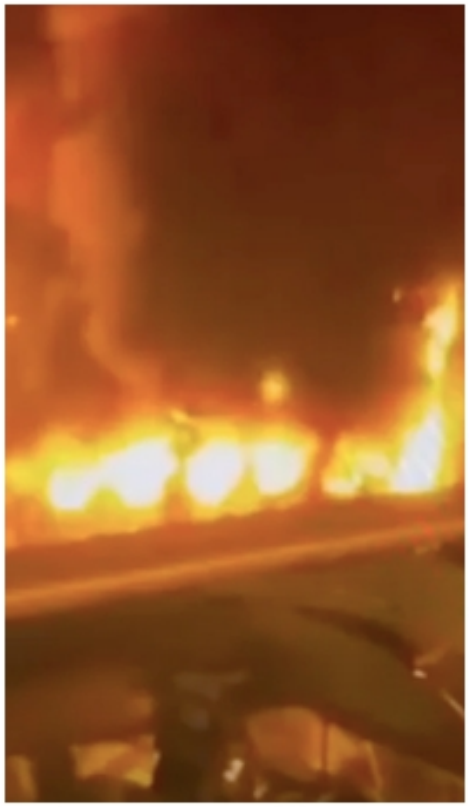
90 SECONDS TO EVACUATE THE PLANE - SAFESKY FREDERICK REITZ ON JAL A350 INFLIGHT CREW

News / Airlines







A rare accident occurred on January 2, 2024 at Tokyo airport. Landing Japan Airlines Airbus A350 collided with coast guard aircraft on the runway, bursting into flames immediately after touching down. After numerous opinions, posts and articles on JAL A350 accident and Alaska Airlines incident, I had to reach out to THE safety expert again to get his opinion on both cases. Frederick Reitz is always ready to point out important aspects and remind all of flyers again and again important things to do and especially not to do.

F.R. One of the things we do at SAFEsky is train inflight crews on security procedures and help the airline get operationally certified. I found it interesting seeing inflight crew members perform in emergency drills. You know, people have a mistaken impression of flight attendants that they are just serving drinks. The real purpose is for the safety of all passengers.

Unfortunately, it takes an accident to realize it, and passengers say, "Oh, they do have proper training and skills." We must think about a couple of things: flight attendants are human, too. JAL A350 was an unexpected event; if they had known they would have had an emergency, they could

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have prepared the cabin, told people to put their heads down, and store their luggage. But this was on a landing, and nobody knew they would be involved in a horrible accident in a few seconds. Everybody complements the cabin crew, but you must also complement the training department!

T.O. Rick, very few travelers are thinking about this, let's say "backstage" job done by the training department to get the best crew members always prepared and trained for different situations.

F.R. When flight attendants are hired, they undergo the initial training, which takes 4 to 8 weeks for most airlines. One of the things they are practicing is emergency evacuation. The FAA requires that the plane be evacuated in 90 seconds. Every aircraft has a different door. For example, Delta Air Lines has 32 different types of aircraft doors. So, the inflight crew members should know how each door opens and how to get people out quickly. Landing is one of the critical phases of flight; that's when, technically, it could be the most dangerous.

Think about it! They were coming in, landing, and everybody was in their seats. I don't know if you have noticed, but flight attendants have shoulder harnesses to keep them secure. When they are sitting there, they should be mentally going through "what if." What if something happens? That is one of the things they are trained in during the initial training. An annual training review also requires flight attendants to review and practice emergency procedures. They take emergency training seriously. And they practice doors again during the recurrent training to keep their procedures current. So, in the JAL accident, the aircraft was landing; unfortunately, the other Coast Guard plane misunderstood the instructions and pulled out in front of them. JAL had three critical things going on at once: a landing, an accident, and a fire. The inflight crew had no time to prepare. They immediately went into emergency mode. Their job is to empty hundreds of passengers in 90 seconds. You must get passengers, who may be screaming and yelling, to listen to you and tell them to leave everything behind. And that's why it was so successful in Japan! Nobody took their personal belongings; it slows down the process for you, the evacuation process for passengers behind you, and it can be dangerous. They did a great job of getting everybody out and not only out because you have to get away.

During the emergency evacuation, flight attendants do not just open a door and let people out, \, they must ensure that the door and exit area are safe and there is no fire or hazards. So, they must first assess the situation and then determine if the exit is safe. And they got to do all of that in 90 seconds. They did an excellent job! The second thing they have to do is open slides, which is also a part of the assessment. Do I need to open the slide, or are we already close enough to the ground that people can jump? Because you want to avoid opening the slide and blocking the exit too. Many things have to go through their minds in a very short period.

T.O. Do you think that the "lucky" circumstance of that accident was the fact that there were Japanese people onboard who were listening?

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F.R. If you Google Chicago plane accident – you will see an American Airlines plane on fire on the runway and people going to get their briefcases and their carry-on bags. Afterward, passengers said it was so hot on board that they jumped over seats to escape the heat. I don't know if we can say it is culturally everywhere, but some people think their belongings are more important than their lives or the lives of other passengers. You have to get off the plane! You can't be distracted! Another thing surprises people – children cannot sit on the emergency exit rows because you need someone who can open that door quickly and get people out the door. If a parent is in the exit row and the child is 4,5, or 6 seats away, parents will be more concerned about their child. I always recommend sitting with your children. If you are sitting in the exit row, you have to take it seriously.

T.O. Talking about doors, it's impossible for me not to ask for your thoughts on the Alaska Airlines flight door incident. Do you think the passengers were scared? And were they aware of what had happened?

F.R. I believe that during the incident, the passengers were frightened and some even mentioned in media interviews that they had sent goodbye messages to their loved ones. Those who were closest to the affected area must have been scared, as they felt the sudden drop in temperature and the rush of wind. They must have been fearful of not knowing if anything else was going to happen. Fortunately, everyone near the area had their seatbelts on. This was another unexpected issue that certainly surprised the inflight crew, who began to communicate with the pilots. In this instance, they assessed the situation and were able to prepare the passengers and cabin for an emergency landing.

An example is another accident when the front door wasn't usable, but people were running towards the door. Inflight crew members had to send them back the other way. You have to be sure people are paying attention.

T.O. Are flight attendants trained to screen people during boarding and determine who could help in an emergency? For example, if they see that people sitting in the exit row are very far from being capable of help in case of emergency, do they have the right to move them?

F.R. There are FAA requirements for sitting in the exit row – you must be 15 and older and physically capable of opening the door. I am sure you've seen that as well as I've seen; some people might have challenges doing that. It is mandatory that before the flight leaves, the flight attendant talks to everybody sitting on the exit row and asks them if they are capable and willing to help in an emergency. We don't think about flying there and back. But the time could come. And that door is 50 to 60 pounds. So, you have to be able to open it and get it out of the way because many people are depending on you. It is also essential that the person going out first, if they are able mentally and physically, stays and helps others to get out, to direct people.

There was another thing, Tatiana, nobody stopped filming. You don't take your selfie or film on the plane when it is on fire because you're blocking other people. That's not the time for your Tik-Tok video when you're running for your life. This is all I have to say on this topic.

T.O. Rick, would it be helpful to put some hours of **training on the market when people could live at least a part of what inflight crew members must do** daily **and some emergency procedures?**

F.R. Airlines are developing creative safety videos to get people's attention. I love your idea of

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letting people come and practice on the door, for example. I know one of the major airlines here invited frequent flyers to come and try what inflight crew members are going through regarding training. It could be something they could implement at the airports with straightforward door training devices. I like that idea; it is a great idea.

T.O. Do you think people forget too much about accidents and are back to flying "like always" without thinking about security?

F.R. I think we are very complaisant. Think about when you drive. You don't need to go through life afraid, but you need to be aware of what's around you and what's happening. When I am on the plane (which is frequent), I don't drink heavily because what if there is an emergency; number 1. Number 2, you want to be able to get out and have a thinking head. You also always have to say what if…I like to sit on the aisle seat because you have control, and you can get out quickly, and you can help others rapidly. You are just being situationally aware of what is happening on the plane and in the airport.

T.O. My last question is regarding numerous highlights of strange and aggressive behavior of U.S. passengers towards inflight crew members, especially between Christmas and New Year. This is not the first year I have seen many similar incidents…

F.R. The courts, at least in the U.S., are starting to crack down. One passenger recently got a very hefty fine for assaulting a flight attendant. Once the system takes it seriously, people see that they cannot get away with the behavior. In the past, it was nothing more like a traffic ticket. We need to bring order back on the planes. But we also need to train inflight crew members to speak with people. There is a way of telling people that "no, you can't do this" and "why" you can't do it. If you talk to people nicely and they have a clear understanding, then it is up to them to respond and follow your commands.

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