



HOVERBOARD BAN DEBACLE HIGHLIGHTS AIRLINE BATTERY SAFETY FAILURES

News / Airlines



Airlines are, finally, more broadly **banning hoverboards** — the self-balancing mini-Segway devices that are all the rage and the holiday gift of 2015 — due to safety reasons relating to their lithium ion batteries. At least ten hoverboards have caught fire across nine US states in recent days. But the delay in doing so, the contradictory messages that have been sent out and not corrected, and the ongoing failures by airlines to communicate what is and is not allowed on board are all deeply problematic for the aviation industry. Action is needed, and it is needed now.

The way that Delta Air Lines has dealt with this problem is representatively symptomatic of the industry's lack of understanding and concern about lithium ion batteries. Delays in acting and uncorrected information are rampant. As recently as 21 November, Delta customer service was advising that hoverboards could be checked into hold luggage.

Clearly, this was and is a colossal fire risk, as numerous expert media observed. Yet four days later, the airline reupped on the hoverboard OK, putting out a press release that the devices were allowed.

The link to that tweet — still published as of press time, with an image of a hoverboard that does not have the red circle and line through it — says that:

“Children near and far are hoping to unwrap the hottest holiday item this year: hoverboards...but now they are banned on all Delta aircraft out of safety considerations. Passengers need to think twice about the batteries powering these and other electronic devices before bringing them to the

airport.”

But the original, helpfully copied by a content scraper as of 26 November, reads:

“Children near and far are hoping to unwrap the newest, coolest holiday item this year — hoverboards. But, passengers should think about the batteries powering these and other electronic devices before bringing them to the airport.”

Delta’s advice would appear to have remained in place as late as 10 December, with a new hoverboard ban posted as of 11 December. That’s four days after Hanukkah began this year. It’s just four days before the USPS last pre-Christmas mailing date for standard post. In the busy run-up to the Christmas period, do airlines seriously think that this kind of late action, without a commensurate set of update notifications to passengers, is sufficient? And what are customers supposed to do: ship the hoverboards, making the opened gifted devices end up in the cargo belly of the very aircraft on which people may be flying?

Let’s reiterate: Delta is not the only airline at fault here. Slow movement on whether or not the holiday gift of the year poses a security threat is an industry problem that requires industry action. Perhaps one of the numerous groups claiming to represent US airlines could make the issue a priority.

A significant part of the problem is, as Runway Girl Network continues to highlight, that airlines and regulators are not talking about batteries in the same way that regular people — airline passengers — talk about batteries.

Overwhelmingly, where manufacturers and retailers talk about battery life, they continue to talk about ampere hours (Ah), the unit of charge, not watt-hours (Wh), a unit of energy being quoted by airlines. Ampere hours are, of course, just larger units of the milliampere hour that those same manufacturers and retailers quote for phones, tablets and so on.

Virgin Australia issued some remarkably poorly written advice on lithium ion batteries on 8 December.

This airline — a significant international partner of Delta’s, as it happens, with full codesharing across numerous services — was talking watt-hours only and gave such helpful recommendation as to ensure that any battery “meets the requirements of the UN Manual of Tests and Criteria, Part III, subsection 38.3”. This is an unparsable, unnavigable 83-page PDF document.

The airline also unhelpfully says that, for batteries under 100 Wh — and let’s remember, batteries are not quoted in Wh — “we will allow a reasonable amount for personal use and the intended itinerary”. It adds that, “Unfortunately, if any of these conditions cannot be met the devices and batteries will not be cleared for carriage.” The ‘reasonable amount’ test is as absurd as it is irresponsible and asinine.

Kontron NOW - VIDEO Avionics_300x300_watchVideoPersonal electronic devices are no longer just phones and tablets and other things we keep in our bags and our pockets — the things with which we manage our lives and without which a significant part of modern society is simply not accessible. Hoverboards, which perhaps a sensible passenger might have known would be an issue, are just one example of these devices moving out of our pockets.

What will happen when the next hoverboard is something that is less “gee, you might have known that might be a problem”, and ends up being whatever the 2016 or 2017 version of the Furby is,

with small children crying at crowded TSA checkpoints after the holidays while uniformed security staff wrench Mr Cuddles from them on the grounds of airline safety?

The commercial aviation industry must set consistent battery standards; it must set them quickly, and it must put in place ways to respond more quickly to whatever the next big thing is in personal electronic devices.

16 DECEMBER 2015

SOURCE: RUNWAYGIRLNETWORK

ARTICLE LINK:

<https://mfa.50skyshades.com/news/airlines/hoverboard-ban-debacle-highlights-airline-battery-safety-failures>