

AVIATION

# FAA airline evacuation tests: Flawed from the start?

By Robert Silk | Mar 31, 2021



The FAA has yet to release the results of evacuation tests conducted from November 2019 through January 2020. Photo Credit: CatwalkPhotos/Shutterstock.com

Flaws in the design of FAA aircraft evacuation tests conducted from November 2019 through January 2020 might be a reason why the agency has yet to release any results.

The tests were undertaken as part of a 2018 congressional mandate that the agency set minimum standards for seat width and the space between rows on commercial aircraft. The standards are to be based upon what is "necessary for the safety and health of passengers" and, per the mandate, were supposed to be set by October 2019.

In a hearing of the House transportation committee on March 25, Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., told DOT secretary Pete Buttigieg that he fears publication of the testing results are being held up as a result of embarrassment.

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The tests were conducted as the FAA sought to determine whether current aircraft cabin configurations, which have become considerably denser in recent decades, can still be evacuated in 90 seconds or less as is required under federal law.

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Cohen, who wrote the legislation that ultimately led to the seat-standards mandate, told Buttigieg that he is under the impression that the FAA did not include people over 60 or under 18 in the evacuation tests. Cohen also suggested that tests were conducted without disabled individuals, carry-on baggage, service animals, obese people, individuals whose primary language isn't English, lap children and children not sitting with their parents.

"This group of people who they did not include in their study, that sounds to me like a representative sample of the people that fly airplanes," Cohen said.

He asked Buttigieg if he would commit to verifying in writing whether those groups of individuals were included in the evacuation tests.

Buttigieg responded indirectly.

"I've requested a look at the research that's been put together so far so we can get it to my office and understand what's going on there," he said.

In a Feb. 3 email to Travel Weekly, FAA spokeswoman Cynthia Ramsay said the agency expected to publish a report on the evacuation tests "in the near future."

Ramsay said on March 26 that the agency does not have an updated time frame.

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