

# The Washington Times

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## Flight attendants trained to cooperate

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published June 23, 2004

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Flight attendants on commercial airlines are still being trained to cooperate with hijackers and be victims rather than fight back, despite the attacks of September 11.

"Their wrists were bound, their throats slashed," Patricia Friend, president of the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), told the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee yesterday.

The September 11 panel revealed that hijackers "beat the last line of defense on the four flights, because the professionals had been trained to cooperate with hijackers, not fight them," Miss Friend said.

"Unfortunately, I am here to report to you that nothing has changed since that horrible day. We are no better prepared today to handle a situation like that which occurred on September 11th and our training is still woefully inadequate."

The AFA, which represents 46,000 flight attendants, wants Congress to legislate training guidelines to teach attendants to help protect the aircraft during a terrorist attack. Currently, training methods vary from airline to airline.

Attendants are trained to fight fires in the air, administer first aid and evacuate a plane in case of an accident, but instruction on dealing with hijackings advises flight attendants to remain complacent, Miss Friend said.

"Our skies are not safe and they will not be safe until flight attendants receive the training necessary to protect our passengers from another September 11," she said.

Tape recordings of the September 11 hijackings reveal that the terrorists first killed the 25 flight attendants on board the four planes to gain entry to the cockpits. One passenger who tried to intervene and save the flight attendants also was murdered.

Most passengers did not witness the fatal attacks because curtains blocked the view between first class and coach. Flight attendants have successfully lobbied to have those curtains removed so they can have a complete view of all passengers.

Additionally, air marshals and pilots are told that if necessary to "shoot through" attendants, and air marshals are being trained to do so during training simulations.

"Doesn't it make more sense to train that flight attendant to assist in a crisis rather than to be a human shield?" Miss Friend said.

The hearing was immediately adjourned without comment from the panel after Miss Friend's testimony owing to the Senate's voting schedule, said Sen. John McCain, Arizona Republican and the committee's chairman.

However, last week, Republicans and Democrats led by the committee's ranking member Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, South Carolina Democrat, wrote David Stone, Transportation Security Administration administrator, reminding the agency that Congress has instructed it three times to develop "comprehensive, mandatory and industrywide standards" for training.

"We find it unacceptable, as flight attendants are the only part of this security team that are guaranteed to be in the cabin 100 percent of all flights and it is absolutely critical that they receive adequate security training," wrote 36 lawmakers.

"We cannot ignore the urgent need for flight attendant security training as it has become clear that Al Qaeda is still targeting U.S. aircraft and that the General Accounting Office has reported that weapons are still making it onboard the aircraft."

The lawmakers said they were "frustrated" that TSA has not developed guidelines and "strongly urged" the agency to act.

Asa Hutchinson, undersecretary for border and transportation security at the Department of Homeland Security, told the panel that the government would soon have a training module in place for voluntary secondary training.

But Miss Friend said after the hearing that "it defies logic" to design secondary training and completely skip initial training.

"We are quite frankly at a loss to understand why neither our industry or the TSA understand the role that we should be trained to perform and the position we are in," she said.

A Homeland Security official said a basic training curriculum was developed and delivered to the airlines to implement but is now being revised with stronger requirements and will be sent back to the airlines to enforce by the end of the year.

That's in addition to the advanced training. Flight attendants also will be given martial arts training.