

PRESS RELEASE

IAFPA Urges Passengers to Leave Cabin Baggage Behind During Aircraft Evacuations

The International Aviation Fire Protection Association highlights the life-saving importance of rapid, unobstructed aircraft evacuations.

Singapore, 24 May 2026. The International Aviation Fire Protection Association (IAFPA) issues a renewed safety warning about passengers attempting to evacuate aircraft with cabin baggage or personal belongings. The association says this behaviour can cause dangerous delays during emergencies and significantly increase the risk of injury or loss of life.

Growing Safety Concern

IAFPA is drawing attention to a growing number of incidents in which passengers attempt to retrieve or carry hand luggage during an aircraft evacuation. In emergencies involving fire, smoke, crash landings or other immediate hazards, every second matters. Any action that slows the evacuation process can put passengers and crew at greater risk.

Why Rapid Evacuation Is Critical

International aviation safety standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization require commercial aircraft operators to demonstrate that all occupants can be evacuated within 90 seconds using only half of the available emergency exits. This standard reflects the reality of onboard emergencies, where smoke, fire, toxic fumes, structural damage or darkness can rapidly make a cabin unsurvivable.

Passengers who carry hand luggage during an evacuation may obstruct aisles and emergency exits, slow the movement of others, damage evacuation slides and increase the likelihood of injury. In a smoke-filled cabin or onboard fire, even a delay of a few seconds can have serious consequences.

Clear Message to Passengers

Flight and cabin crew are trained to manage emergency evacuations under extreme pressure. IAFPA emphasises that, in any evacuation, the priority must always be the preservation of life rather than the recovery of personal belongings. Passengers can support a safe evacuation by leaving all cabin baggage behind and following crew instructions immediately.

IAFPA Calls for Greater Public Awareness

- Airlines and aviation authorities should continue to strengthen public awareness campaigns on evacuation safety.
- Airports and carriers should reinforce pre-flight safety briefings and clearly state that baggage must not be retrieved during an emergency.
- Pre-landing, passengers should be reminded of the dangers of stopping to collect personal belongings, especially from overhead compartments.
- Passengers should recognise that attempting to recover personal items during an evacuation can endanger their own lives as well as the lives of fellow passengers and crew.

IAFPA is encouraging the aviation sector, regulators and the travelling public to work together to reinforce a simple message: in any aircraft evacuation, leave baggage behind, move quickly and follow crew instructions at all times.

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