

# FACT SHEET:

## STOWAGE OF MANUAL WHEELCHAIRS ON NEW AIRCRAFT

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### **Overview and Background**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has published a new rule allowing airlines to choose between stowing wheelchairs in a cabin compartment on new aircraft or strapping them to a row of seats, an option that will ensure that two manual, folding wheelchairs can be transported at a time. DOT has allowed airlines to use the seat-strapping method on existing aircraft for ten years. The new rule now allows airlines to use this method of transporting wheelchairs on new aircraft.

The new rule provides airlines with more flexibility because it permits airlines to transport passenger wheelchairs by strapping them across a row of seats using a strap kit that complies with applicable safety standards, in addition to stowing them in a closet or similar compartment. In 2008, DOT issued a rule prohibiting airlines from using the seat-strapping method on new aircraft as an alternative to stowing the manual wheelchair in a closet or similar compartment. In that same rule, DOT allowed the use of a seat-strapping method on existing aircraft. Based on a fuller evaluation of the costs and benefits, DOT has now revised its position to also allow the use of seat-strapping on new aircraft subject to certain conditions. For example, if an airline chooses to use the seat-strapping method to stow a wheelchair, it must transport two wheelchairs in the cabin if requested unless stowing the second wheelchair would displace other passengers.

### **What does this rule mean to passengers with disabilities?**

- On aircraft where an airline uses the seat strapping method, the airline must carry up to two such manual folding wheelchairs if requested as long as stowing the second wheelchair would not displace passengers. Airlines must reserve space for the first manual wheelchair or be prepared to displace passengers if necessary to transport that wheelchair.
- On aircraft where an airline stows a passenger's wheelchair in a closet in the cabin, there must be a prominent sign or placard on the closet indicating that a wheelchair and other assistive devices have priority over other items brought into the cabin by other passengers or crew, thereby making it clear that a manual wheelchair and other assistive devices should be transported in the cabin and making compliance more likely.

### **What does this rule mean to airlines?**

- Airlines have the flexibility to select among the methods described in the rule for carrying passengers' manual folding wheelchairs in the passenger cabin of new aircraft.

- If an airline chooses to stow passengers' wheelchairs in the cabin using the seat-strapping method, the airline must transport as many as two such wheelchairs in the cabin if requested unless stowing the second wheelchair would displace passengers on that flight.
- Airlines must reserve space for the first wheelchair or be prepared to displace passengers if necessary to transport that wheelchair. Airlines are prohibited from suggesting that a passenger not stow his or her wheelchair in the cabin for any non-safety related reason and are required to offer pre-boarding to a passenger stowing his or her wheelchair. Airlines are also required to provide denied boarding compensation to persons not able to travel on a flight because their seats are being used to stow a passenger's wheelchair.
- If you use a closet as the priority space to stow a passenger's manual wheelchair in the cabin, you must install a prominent sign or placard on the closet indicating that wheelchairs have priority over other items brought into the cabin by other passengers or crew.

## **Effective Date**

This rule becomes effective 60 days after publication in the Federal Register.

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The final rule on seat-strapping of wheelchairs is available on the Internet at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), docket DOT-OST-2011-0098. If you have questions regarding this fact sheet, you can contact Blane A. Workie, Deputy Assistant General Counsel, Office of Aviation Enforcement and Proceedings, Department of Transportation, at 1200 New Jersey Ave SE, Washington, DC 20590. You can also reach her at 202-366-9342 (phone), 202-366-7152 (fax), or [blane.workie@dot.gov](mailto:blane.workie@dot.gov).