

# Flying is Nuts

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Next summer, our family is going to Disneyworld to celebrate my parents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. My kids are so excited to go on Space Mountain and have brunch with Mickey, while I'm pumped because we're going during 'Star Wars' weekend.

We're still a little bit nervous, however, about flying down to Orlando. Our son is deathly allergic to peanuts and some airlines still serve peanuts on their flights. That's why we were hopeful when last year the U.S. Department of Transportation invited the public to comment on a proposal addressing peanuts on airplanes.

The proposal included three possible options: (a) a complete ban on serving peanuts on planes; (b) a ban on serving them when a passenger requests a peanut-free flight in advance; or (c) or a requirement for peanut-free buffer zones around severely allergic passengers who make advance requests. The DOT also solicited public input on simply continuing to allow peanuts on planes.

In addition to addressing the peanut situation, the DOT also asked for comments on airline fees, bumping passengers, tarmac delays and other issues affecting air travel. More than 2,000 responses were received, and according to the DOT, "the vast majority of which were related to the proposal to address peanut allergies in air travel." Most of the respondents favored a total ban on peanuts.

Not everyone was in favor of a change, however, such as the nut industry. Well, apparently Mr. Peanut has important friends in Washington because the new rules issued last week by the DOT did not address peanuts.

The agency cited a 1999 law that prevents a change to the peanut policy without conducting a scientific study. The DOT released a statement that read, "The Department is prohibited by law from restricting the serving of peanuts aboard aircraft unless a peer-reviewed study determines that serving of peanuts causes severe reactions among airline passengers. There has been no such peer-reviewed study, so we declined to take action at this time."

So now the DOT is asking the public to comment on whether a peer-reviewed study should be conducted. I vote 'yes' and I hope a study results in a law change. Had the rules released last week contained a ban on peanuts, I would have felt a lot safer about flying next year. That is, until I heard about air traffic controllers falling asleep on the job.

The Federal Aviation Administration fired two air traffic controllers, one from Knoxville, Tennessee, and the other from Miami, Florida, for sleeping incidents. The firings come on the heels of other incidents in Seattle, Washington and Reno, Nevada and two suspected cases in Lubbock, Texas. Coincidentally, all the incidents occurred during controllers' midnight shifts.

As a result, officials from the FAA and the air traffic controllers' union toured air traffic control facilities across the country to hold a series of meetings about safety and professionalism. In addition, the FAA issued new regulations designed to prevent air traffic controllers from falling asleep while on duty.

The new rules require controllers to have a minimum of nine hours off between shifts, instead of the current minimum of eight hours. Also, controllers can no longer be put on an unscheduled midnight shift following a day off. Finally, FAA managers also will schedule their own shifts to provide greater coverage in the early morning and late night hours.

On second thought, maybe we'll drive to Florida.

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