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Department of Transportation Offers Advice on the Safe Transportation of Batteries and Battery-Powered Devices by Airline Passengers and Crew

Air travelers flying with the kinds of batteries used in many cell phones, laptops, cameras and other portable electronic devices should take precautions to reduce the risk of fires on aircraft, according to a new safety advisory released by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

"We're determined to keep America's airlines the safest in the world," said PHMSA Chief Safety Officer and Assistant Administrator Stacey L. Gerard. "Airline passengers can help us do that by following simple precautions in packing and handling their batteries and battery-powered equipment."

Passengers should, according to the advisory, keep spare batteries in their original retail packaging; keep loose batteries covered with insulating tape to protect them from contact with metal objects; place each battery in its own protective case, plastic bag, or package; and pack spare batteries in carry-on baggage, rather than checked baggage. Also, passengers should use only chargers designed for the battery type and take steps to prevent crushing, puncturing or dropping batteries.

The agency said it was concerned by two recent incidents on board commercial aircraft. On February 10, a fire broke out in the overhead baggage compartment on a JetBlue flight. Preliminary investigation results indicate one or more loose batteries may have been the source of the fire. On March 18, PHMSA received reports that a battery had overheated or ignited on board an American Airlines aircraft flying from Argentina. In each case, airline employees responded quickly, extinguishing the fire and safely landing the aircraft.

The agency noted that current regulations provide for the safe transportation of batteries and that it is moving forward with proposals to enhance the safety requirements, particularly with respect to testing, labeling, and packaging standards. The agency is working with the Air Line Pilots Association, in conjunction with the International Federation of Air Line Pilots Associations, to send a similar Safety Alert to their 60,000 member pilots. The agency is working with manufacturers to improve design and packaging for all batteries. It added that it also is working with the Federal Aviation Administration on the safe transportation of batteries on aircraft, and with consumer device manufacturers, testing laboratories, and other federal and state safety officials to help improve battery safety.

For more information, go to the DOT website: <http://safetravel.dot.gov>.

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