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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Nov. 01, 2013

The FAA is finally welcoming the digital age. Mostly...

On Thursday, the Federal Aviation Administration announced "that airlines can safely expand passenger use of Portable Electronic Devices (PEDs) during all phases of flight, and is immediately providing the airlines with implementation guidance."

The "mostly" part refers to one part of the announcement: While the FAA now says that pretty much all personal digital and entertainment devices can be left "on" during flights, passengers are not supposed to use the "phone" part of their cell phones. AKA, voice traffic. Also, different airlines will be implementing the policy on their own timeframe.

Our own contributor [Dave McClure](http://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/blog/10683036/technology-and-airplanes) wrote about the subject back in March: www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/blog/10683036/technology-and-airplanes.

According to the FAA, "Due to differences among fleets and operations, the implementation will vary among airlines, but the agency expects many carriers will prove to the FAA that their planes allow passengers to safely use their devices in airplane mode, gate-to-gate, by the end of the year."

The FAA based its decision on input from a group of experts that included representatives from the airlines, aviation manufacturers, passengers, pilots, flight attendants, and the mobile technology industry.

Passengers will eventually be able to read e-books, play games, and watch videos on

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“We believe today’s decision honors both our commitment to safety and consumer’s increasing desire to use their electronic devices during all phases of their flights,” said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “These guidelines reflect input from passengers, pilots, manufacturers, and flight attendants, and I look forward to seeing airlines implement these much anticipated guidelines in the near future.”

“I commend the dedication and excellent work of all the experts who spent the past year working together to give us a solid report so we can now move forward with a safety-based decision on when passengers can use PEDs on airplanes,” said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta.

The PED Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) concluded most commercial airplanes can tolerate radio interference signals from PEDs. In a recent report, they recommended that the FAA provide airlines with new procedures to assess if their airplanes can tolerate radio interference from PEDs. Once an airline verifies the tolerance of its fleet, it can allow passengers to use handheld, lightweight electronic devices – such as tablets, e-readers, and smartphones—at all altitudes. In rare instances of low-visibility, the crew will instruct passengers to turn off their devices during landing. The group also recommended that heavier devices should be safely stowed under seats or in overhead bins during takeoff and landing.

The FAA is streamlining the approval of expanded PED use by giving airlines updated, clear **guidance**. This FAA tool will help airlines assess the risks of potential PED-induced avionics problems for their airplanes and specific operations. Airlines will evaluate avionics as well as changes to stowage rules and passenger announcements. Each airline will also need to revise manuals, checklists for crewmember training materials, carry-on baggage programs and passenger briefings before expanding use of PEDs. Each airline will determine how and when they will allow passengers broader use of PEDs.

The FAA did not consider changing the regulations regarding the use of cell phones

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2. Changes to PED policies will not happen immediately and will vary by airline. Check with your airline to see if and when you can use your PED.
3. Current PED policies remain in effect until an airline completes a safety assessment, gets FAA approval, and changes its PED policy.
4. Cell phones may not be used for voice communications.
5. Devices must be used in airplane mode or with the cellular connection disabled. You may use the WiFi connection on your device if the plane has an installed WiFi system and the airline allows its use. You can also continue to use short-range Bluetooth accessories, like wireless keyboards.
6. Properly stow heavier devices under seats or in the overhead bins during takeoff and landing. These items could impede evacuation of an aircraft or may injure you or someone else in the event of turbulence or an accident.
7. During the safety briefing, put down electronic devices, books and newspapers and listen to the crewmember's instructions.
8. It only takes a few minutes to secure items according to the crew's instructions during takeoff and landing.
9. In some instances of low visibility – about one percent of flights – some landing systems may not be proved PED tolerant, so you may be asked to turn off your device.
0. Always follow crew instructions and immediately turn off your device if asked.

Current FAA regulations require an aircraft operator to determine that radio frequency interference from PEDs is not a flight safety risk before the operator authorizes them for use during certain phases of flight. Even PEDs that do not intentionally transmit signals can emit unintentional radio energy. This energy may affect aircraft safety because the signals can occur at the same frequencies used by the plane's highly sensitive communications, navigation, flight control and electronic equipment. An airline must show it can prevent potential interference that could

pose a safety hazard. The PED ARC report helps the FAA to guide airlines through

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2012 FAA Notice on current policy, guidance, and procedures that aircraft operators use when determining if passengers can use PEDs. The group did not consider the use of electronic devices for voice communications. A [fact sheet](#) on the report is now available.

The FAA is immediately giving airlines a clear path to safely expand PED use by passengers, and the Administrator will evaluate the rest of the ARC's longer-term recommendations and respond at a later date.

A Portable Electronic Device is any piece of lightweight, electrically-powered equipment. These devices are typically consumer electronic devices capable of communications, data processing and/or utility. Examples range from handheld, lightweight electronic devices such as tablets, e-readers, and smartphones to small devices such as MP3 players and electronic toys.

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