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Canadian Airlines hit by smoking ban

By HARVEY ELLIOTT, AIR CORRESPONDENT

CANADIAN Airlines has been thrown into a tailspin by an internal report which shows that banning smoking on flights, a move that will soon be forced on all registered Canadian airlines by Ottawa, may cost the company more than £20 million a year. The airline is especially concerned that Japanese will turn to rival airlines.

Half of Japanese air travellers smoke and those who go first or business class smoke more than passengers in economy seats.

"More than 80 per cent of all the people on our services between Canada and Japan originate from Japan," said the executive vice-president of Canadian Airlines, Kevin Jenkins. Banning smoking on these flights, he said, would cost the company about £20 million and put it at a commercial disadvantage.

When the company's main rival on the routes - Japanese Airlines - heard of the ban, it sent a letter to Mr Jenkins. "So sorry", it said. Still, the company's plight could be

worse. Originally, the Canadian government had said airlines would have to outlaw smoking on all flights in one fell swoop on July 1.

But after being presented with the results of the Canadian Airlines's report, politicians agreed to let the airlines phase out smoking over four years.

A small loophole in the legislation means the company can reduce smoking on other flights and leave the Japanese to puff until the total ban is required in three years.

Canadian Airlines have opened a lobbying campaign aimed at persuading other airlines, or even international legislators, to outlaw smoking in the same way as the Canadians and to provide a "level playing field" in which everyone will at least have the same problem.

"Our aircraft will lead less maintenance because the air filters will not need cleaning so often and the cabin will be cleaner for longer," admitted Mr Jenkins. "But it will only save us a tiny proportion of the amount we will lose."

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