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Canada to ban all smoking on domestic airlines by mid-1993

OTTAWA (UPI) -- The Canadian government announced plans Thursday to ban smoking on all international flights by domestic airlines by July 1, 1993.

Currently, smoking is banned on all domestic and transborder flights and a ban on international flights of less than six hours is set to come into effect on July 1.

"The government's position on smoking in the workplace is very clear," said Doug Lewis, Canada's transport minister, in announcing the plans.

Although 95 percent of all flights by Canadian airlines are smoke-free, the companies will be required to reduce the proportion of seats for smokers in a series of annual 25 percent cuts beginning on July 1, Lewis said.

As of July 1, 1993, smoking will no longer be allowed on Canadian carriers.

Canadian Airlines International of Calgary said the government's action was poorly timed given high interest rates, an economic slowdown and a soft travel market.

The company said that without the smoking ban being extended to all foreign carriers operating into Canada "the new regulations will unfairly and severely hamper" the ability of Canadian Airlines to compete internationally.

But Canadian Airlines applauded Lewis who said he would try to convince officials from other governments to follow Canada's lead.

In a letter dated Thursday to the president of the International Civil Aviation Organization, which is based in Montreal, Lewis requested an opportunity to attend the ICAO's fall assembly and to ask the members to make international non-smoking regulations "a high priority."

"I believe that other nations share Canada's concern regarding the hazards of smoking on board aircraft and that, with the assistance of the ICAO and its member states, important progress can be made on this matter," Lewis wrote.

Lewis said the government's "comprehensive strategy will help us obtain a smoke-free environment on all flights while permitting our air carrier industry to remain competitive."

Canadian Airlines said the unilateral ban could result in a more than \$35 million loss, half of its international routes revenues.

The losses, the company estimated, would result primarily from a drop in passengers on its Japan-Canada route. Over 80 percent of traffic on this route originates in Japan, and 53 percent of those passengers are smokers, Canadian Airlines said.

"Passengers from Pacific Rim countries and Europe do not view smoking in the same way as North Americans, it's very much a part of their culture," the company said.

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