

## **FAA's zero-tolerance policy is working – unruly passenger incidents down 50%**

(Courtesy of Harriet Baskas, The Points Guy, published 1/17/2022)

We're three weeks into 2022 and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has already tallied 76 unruly passenger reports, 43 of which were related to masks.

These numbers are as of Jan. 11. And we're not sure if they include last Tuesday's headline-grabbing incident during which a passenger entered an open cockpit door and caused damage to an American Airlines plane getting ready to depart Honduras.

Unruly passenger incidents on airplanes are clearly continuing into the new year.

But as we mark the one-year anniversary of the FAA's introduction of its zero-tolerance policy for unruly passenger behavior on airplanes, the number of incidents is at least trending down.

FAA's data marks 2021 as the worst year on record in terms of unruly passenger behavior. Last year the [FAA logged 5,981 unruly passenger reports](#), including 4,290 mask-related incidents. In response to a spike in incidents early in the year, the FAA introduced its Zero-Tolerance policy on Jan. 13, 2021.

The FAA said at the time that rather than addressing unruly passenger incidents with its usual methods, which ranged from "warnings and counseling to civil penalties," it would instead "pursue legal enforcement action against any passenger who assaults, threatens, intimidates or interferes with airline crew members."

On Feb. 26, 2021, the FAA [proposed a hefty fine against an unruly passenger](#) who had allegedly interfered with and assaulted a flight attendant. Around the same time, [airlines began sharing the number](#) of passengers they were banning for being unruly and refusing to wear masks. In some cases, those airline bans are set to expire when the government's mask mandate is lifted. ([The mask mandate is currently in force until March 18.](#)) In others, the ban is for life.

Lo and behold, the number of unruly passenger incidents began to dip lower in the first quarter of 2021, with numbers down around 50% since the FAA's policy began being enforced.

In addition to levying – and publicizing – hefty fines for unruly passengers, the FAA's Zero Tolerance campaign includes airport signage, social media memes, and a series of public service announcements and videos, one of which features kids instructing adults on how to behave on airplanes.

While unruly passenger reports are still hovering at about 50% below the worst of 2021, they are still quite high. At the peak in 2021, the FAA was reporting more than a dozen unruly passenger incidents per 10,000 flights. For the first full week of January, the unruly passenger rate was 4.9 incidents per 10,000 flights. And when "unruly" behavior includes serious physical assaults on flight attendants and other passengers, any incidents are unacceptable.

Aviation security expert Jeff Price thinks the numbers are going in the right direction. "I think publicity of people getting large fines and more criminal charges and jail time are responsible for some of the downturn," Price told TPG. "People are learning that flying isn't a right and that there are consequences for their actions on board."