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Dry the Friendly Skies

Smoking is forbidden on flights. For safety's sake, alcohol should be banned as well.

By Satish Jindel

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A man was arrested after what one news report called “a screaming tirade involving spit and blood” on an [American Airlines](#) flight on May 23. An attendant had refused to serve the man another beer, concluding he was already intoxicated. To avoid such incidents, airlines should stop serving alcohol altogether.

As a frequent flier—Executive Platinum status with American—I often witness disruption caused by excessive drinking. On a recent flight from Pittsburgh to Miami, the passenger next to me in first class started drinking soon after departure—at 7:30 a.m. He consumed at least four small bottles before the flight attendant refused to serve him more. I had to tolerate his loud complaints for the rest of the flight.

For decades, airlines allowed smoking, despite complaints from nonsmoking passengers about the smoke wafting into their section. Airlines incurred only costs from these smokers: Passengers brought their own cigarettes, while airlines had to pay for cleaning the cabin and the air. When the U.S. banned smoking on most domestic flights in 1990, it was all financial upside for the airlines.



PHOTO: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

By contrast, security restrictions mean passengers can't bring alcohol into the cabin. Airlines thus have a monopoly on drink sales, which is a revenue center. But is it worth the cost of dealing with disruptive passengers? When I've asked flight attendants, they've overwhelmingly supported a ban on in-flight alcohol.

Drunken passengers might still occasionally appear at the gate —alcohol would still be available at airport restaurants and lounges. Then again, a ban would benefit those restaurants, which have been

hurt since nonpassengers were banned from secured areas of the airports.

A ban on in-flight alcohol also would be good for passengers' health. Alcohol consumes oxygen, and any medical professional will confirm that at 30,000 feet in the air, the human body is already low in oxygen.

As smokers have adjusted to nonsmoking flights, drinkers would also adjust. If the airlines fail to act in the best interest of themselves and their passengers, Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration should do so —as they did with smoking.

Mr. Jindel is founder of SJC Consulting Group, which works in the transportation and logistics industries.