



PILOT CAUGHT TEXTING DURING TAKEOFF FROM CHARLOTTE

News / Airlines



An airline pilot, flying as a passenger on a recent flight from Charlotte, was caught on camera texting on his cellphone while the plane was taking off -- in violation of federal rules.

Chad Tillman, a Charlotte resident who was on the Aug. 14 flight from Charlotte to Tampa, used his own cellphone to capture video of the unidentified pilot as he texted.

The flight was operated by American Airlines, but the pilot worked for a different airline, a spokeswoman for American said.

Soon after landing in Florida, Tillman wrote a letter to American Airlines CEO Doug Parker to express his concern.

"I am sure he is a good pilot, but even a small lapse in judgment in his profession can get people killed, and it bothers me that he can so casually disregard FAA regulations in the public view," Tillman wrote. "I fear what he may be doing in the cockpit that could jeopardize passenger safety."

American Airlines declined to identify the pilot or the airline he worked for.

"I do know the other airline addressed the issue with the pilot," American Airlines spokeswoman Andrea Huguely said.

She declined to say whether the other airline disciplined the pilot.

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Charlotte resident Chad Tillman, who recently shot video of a pilot texting during takeoff.

"If someone is concerned about what another passenger is doing, notify the flight attendant so they can address it when it happens," Huguely said.

The Federal Aviation Administration recently relaxed the rules governing the use of portable electronic devices on planes. Passengers can now operate those devices during flight, as long as they are set to airplane mode.

But the rules still don't allow passengers to use cellphones to make calls or send text messages during takeoff and flight.

"The concern is that anything that emits a signal may interfere with the avionics/electrical systems in the cockpit," an FAA spokesperson wrote.

Tillman, a Charlotte patent attorney, said his own smartphone was set to airplane mode when he took the video of the texting pilot.

On previous flights, he said, attendants have told him to turn his cellphone off. So he said he was initially annoyed -- and later disturbed -- to see a pilot ignoring the rules.

"I started thinking, 'They've got these rules in place for a reason,'" Tillman said. "... The pilots, more than anyone, should know those rules and obey them."

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