



OFF-DUTY PILOT'S FREE FLIGHT TO NEW YORK SPARKS CONFUSION, SEARCH AT LAX

News / Airports / Routes



An off-duty JetBlue pilot looking for a free ride back to New York sparked confusion and a brief search at Los Angeles International Airport on Thursday morning when he switched flights without airport officials' knowledge, authorities said.

The pilot was spotted in the hallway leading to a JetBlue aircraft from Terminal 3's Gate 31B about 6:00 a.m., said LAX police Officer Rob Pedregon. The pilot, in uniform but off duty, spoke with an airport employee and then went on his way.

The airport employee, however, didn't know that the off-duty pilot was on the flight's manifest as a passenger and was expected to stay in the cockpit's third seat when it flew to New York, Pedregon said.

When the worker heard that the pilots for the JetBlue flight weren't on board, he concluded the uniformed man he spoke with on the bridge may have been an unauthorized person and called police, Pedregon said.

Authorities began a search for the man in uniform while crews towed the aircraft to an isolated area to be rechecked. An LAPD bomb squad and airport police inspected the plane and passengers' checked luggage. The flight was scheduled to take off at 6:30 a.m. but wasn't cleared until nearly four hours later.

The search eventually was called off when authorities found the name of an off-duty pilot on the manifest for both the delayed JetBlue flight and a Virgin America flight that already had taken off for JFK airport.

That was the man the airport employee spoke with in the JetBlue hallway, Pedregon said.

The off-duty pilot appeared to have switched planes without people realizing it, he said. Airlines offer free flights to other company's pilots as a professional courtesy, he said.

In an unrelated incident Thursday morning, airport police received a report of a second unauthorized person at LAX. Police ultimately detained four juveniles in a vacant lot owned by LAX next to the airport. The four had jumped a fence onto the lot, Pedregon said.

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