

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Beth Harper

Publicist

212.207.7985

beth.harper@harpercollins.com

“The dissection of major airlines’ use of regional carriers with lower safety standards for short flights, among other troubling practices, makes this an effective polemic...compelling read.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“...well-researched narrative...Informative”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS

The Airlines’ Dangerous Descent – and How to Reclaim Our Skies

By
William J. McGee

Lost baggage. Lengthy delays. Canceled flights. Anyone who has flown recently knows that consumer frustration with airlines is at an all-time high. While many Americans are frustrated with airlines for common problems such as baggage fees and poor service, few people realize that far more serious issues exist. Award-winning journalist and consumer advocate chosen by the Department of Transportation, **William J. McGee** has crisscrossed the country and globe, immersing himself in the world of commercial airlines, uncovering the truth behind the sobering issues plaguing the industry. In his provocative and hard-hitting new book, **ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS: *The Airlines’ Dangerous Descent – and How to Reclaim Our Skies*** (Harper; June 26, 2012; Hardcover; \$26.99), McGee presents a searing look at the dark underbelly of the airline industry.

For three decades, McGee has been closely following the numerous changes in the airline industry. In researching the industry’s lesser-known – but undoubtedly significant – issues, McGee

speaks to industry insiders. He interviews pilots, mechanics, FAA inspectors, TSA screeners, CEOs of major carriers, legislators, and even Steven Slater, the headline-making disgruntled JetBlue flight attendant. He also travels all over the globe, from the lost baggage center in Scottsboro, Alabama; to outsourced call centers in Mumbai, India; to the site of the 2009 fatal regional plane crash in Buffalo.

As a result of his research, McGee reveals how airline executives are cutting costs in “a mad race to the bottom.” A *Fast Food Nation* of the airline industry, **ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS** exposes numerous shocking problems, among them:

- Outsourced aircraft maintenance that is unrecorded by the FAA
- The prevalence of codesharing and regional partners – a practice which results in variation in standards of safety
- The increasingly common practice of outsourcing everything from baggage handling to call centers
- The startling influence of airline lobbyists on political parties and government legislators and regulators

McGee’s alarming exposé pulls back the curtain on critical issues that few Americans – including frequent flyers – are aware of, and reveals the true state of the “friendly skies” today. **ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS** is an essential read that offers critical new insights into what must be done to keep the struggling industry from its dangerous descent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William J. McGee is an award-winning travel journalist for *Consumer Reports* and the former editor of *Consumer Reports Travel Letter*. In 2010 the US secretary of transportation chose him as the lone consumer advocate on the Future of Aviation Advisory Committee. He also writes a monthly travel column for USA Today.com, and has contributed to *Condé Nast Traveler*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Money*, *Good Housekeeping*, and many other publications. Prior to becoming a journalist, McGee spent nearly seven years in airline flight operations management. He is an FAA licensed aircraft dispatcher and has served in the US Air Force Auxiliary. He earned an MFA from Columbia University and currently teaches creative writing at Hofstra University. McGee lives in Connecticut.

ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS

The Airlines’ Dangerous Descent – and How to Reclaim Our Skies

By William J. McGee

Harper

On-sale: June 26, 2012

Hardcover; \$26.99

9780062088376

TOP TEN CRISES AFFECTING AIRLINES – AND ALL OF US

- **Lack of FAA Oversight for Outsourced Repair Shops:** Dozens of frontline Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspectors have told the author the FAA is NOT providing the budget, time, and resources to properly oversee outsourced repair shops. Critics claim the FAA has been rendered toothless through wholesale corporate lobbying and an internal culture that views airlines – and not citizens – as the government’s “customers.”
- **Rise in Regional Partners and Lack of Accountability:** Today, 53% of all airline flight departures in the U.S. are operated by the major carriers’ “regional partners,” companies with less familiar names such as Comair and Colgan. While the industry continually boasts that no “major” U.S. airline has suffered a fatal accident since 2001, over the past 9 years, 6 crashes of small carriers led to 155 deaths. Although the FAA claims there is “one standard of safety,” experts assert there are tangible differences.
- **Risk of Injury for Lap Children:** For more than 20 years, the National Transportation Safety Board and other experts have urged the FAA to close the loophole that allows children under the age of 2 to fly unrestrained. It is an indisputable fact that “lap children” are at risk for injuries and deaths, but the FAA refuses to mandate safety restraints for the most vulnerable travelers.
- **Security Loopholes:** It costs \$700 million annually for air marshals to protect only 2% of U.S. flights, while security loopholes abound at domestic airports. Former government employees and other experts assail the Transportation Security Administration for engaging in “security theater” with an undue emphasis on passenger screening at the expense of other methodologies.
- **Prevalence of Outsourced Maintenance:** Over the last decade, 71% of all U.S. airline heavy maintenance has been outsourced, often overseas to developing nations, with only one domestic carrier – American Airlines – still performing most work in-house. Many outsourced facilities are staffed by unlicensed mechanics not subject to the same security vetting, alcohol and drug screening, and training requirements. According to expert testimony, up to 76% of all airline safety discrepancies are not being reported.
- **A System Over Capacity:** Commercial flights in the U.S. are fuller than at any time since the airlines were troop carriers during WWII, with occupied seats averaging 82.7% last year. Experts maintain these loads strain the system, reducing comfort while filling cabins and overhead bins, and generating flight delays, mishandled baggage, and even air rage.
- **An Out-of-Control Pricing and Fee Structure:** Nickel-and-diming for services such as checked baggage – what the airlines call “ancillary revenue – generated \$32.5 billion in 2011. And every day, 6 billion airfares are loaded into computer reservation systems, fueling arcane and often nonsensical pricing. Yet millions of consumers are unable to calculate the bottom line cost of a ticket, inclusive of all fees.
- **An Oversized Environmental Footprint:** Aviation is responsible for 2-5% of climate change, and the industry’s CO₂ output will grow 3-4% annually. But the single greatest advancement for alleviating the nation’s ENTIRE carbon footprint is to reduce our reliance on thousands of

regional flights that clog major cities with smaller planes, particularly in the Northeast, where rail and other transportation modes are sensible alternatives.

- **A Workforce in Crisis:** The airline industry is a microcosm of the nation's labor crisis. In the airline industry, senior executives are awarded millions in bonuses, tens of thousands of skilled American jobs are shipped overseas, and veteran employees are replaced by transient armies of unskilled, untrained, underpaid, outsourced employees.
- **Effects of Deregulation:** Since the industry was deregulated in 1978, 189 domestic airlines have filed for bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the Departments of Transportation and Justice have rubber-stamped merger after merger, further shrinking the industry. The results: fewer passenger choices, curtailed service, higher fares in certain cities, and a massive exodus of jobs.