BOMB SCARES, BLOOD SPILLAGES AND PLANE HIJACKING: THE SECRET EMERGENCY CODES YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW

News / Airlines

In order to discreetly communicate with each other professionals working on planes, the Underground or cruise ships have their own language.

Their unique codes and jargon help them to deal with situations from dangerous threats like bomb scares and hijacking, to cleaning issues like vomit or glass - all without spreading panic among passengers.

Here are some of the codes that the public are not meant to know the meaning behind...

Aircraft emergencies

When an aircraft is facing imminent danger various codes are sent to the ground by the pilots to relay the nature of the threat.

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The code 7500 is used if the aircraft is under threat of, or has been, hijacked.

If there has been a radio failure 7600 is used, and 7700 indicates a general emergency.

In December 2014 a plane forced into an emergency landing because of a technical fault accidentally sent out a hijacking signal after the pilot pressed the wrong button.

Ground crew mistakenly believed that the Vietnam Airlines jet, which had been travelling from Ho Chi Minh City to the northern town of Vinh, was under attack, but it turned out the pilot had mistakenly sent 7500 instead of 7700.

Inspector Sands is used as a discreet way to alert staff and emergency services such as the police, that there is a fire or bomb scare, without creating widespread panic to the publicCode 1 refers to blood, Code 2 urine or faeces, Code 3 vomit and Code 4 stands for a general spillage.

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Code Adam is used in airports to signify a missing child, whereas Code Bravo is used to frighten guests so agents can quickly locate the source of a threat

Airport emergencies

Despite many of the listed codes being used to minimise alarm among customers, Code Bravo is used to deliberately frighten guests.

This is useful when agents are trying to locate the source of a threat with minimal interference from the public.

Code Adam is used for a missing child. This name started being used in 1994, in memory of six-year-old Adam Walsh, who got lost in a Sears department .

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When cabin crew say 'crotch watch' this is actually a nickname for walking through the cabin to do a seatbelt check. Also called a groin scan

Cabin crew speak

Sarah Steegar, a flight attendant with a major US carrier for the past 15 years, explained the hidden meaning behind many of the words used by staff on frequent flyer website Flyertalk.

Blue juice

The blue water in the toilets. Not to be confused with 'crew juice', a special cocktail to be enjoyed on the van ride to a long layover hotel, usually as a sort of sleep-aid after an all-night flight.

Recipes vary and may be subject to competitive secrecy.

Crotch watch

Nickname for walking through the cabin to do a seatbelt check. Also called a 'groin scan'.

Deadhead

Everybody loves this one, but few use it correctly. It means flying as a passenger — as a company assignment.

Basically, the airline needs you to be somewhere other than where you are, and you cannot or are not needed to work the flight. Best guess is it's an old theatre term.

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Furlough

When airlines need to shrink, most don't 'lay off', they 'furlough'.

If the business bounces back within a certain amount of time, the airline has to offer you your job back before they can hire new stews or pilots off the street.

Pax

'Passengers'.

Slam-click(er)

When a crew member goes to the hotel and does not emerge again until it's time to leave.

As in: slamming the door and clicking the lock. End of story. Can be used as a noun or a verb. ('I'm so tired I'm just gonna slam-click.' Or 'you won't see her for dinner. She's a slam-clicker'.)

Coach roach

Used wryly, usually for flight attendants who prefer working in the main/coach cabin. 'Business? No thanks. I'm a coach roach all the way, baby!'

If planes are put in the Sin Bin, this refers to an area of the taxiways near a runway where an aircraft may be sent to wait out of the way of other aircraft

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Pilot chat

Whizzer

'This is the casual term for the Auxiliary Power Unit: the small, unnoticed engine at the back of a plane,' explains British Airways Senior First Officer and author of Skyfaring: A Journey with a Pilot, Mark Vanhoenacker.

The engine, which can be found by looking for the telltale small hole in the tip of the tail, powers the electrical systems and air conditioning when the main engines aren't running.

Presumably, it's named for the noise that it makes.

The Heavy

'It's not a reference to my waistline!' Mark jokes. It actually refers to the additional pilots on longer flights to share the flying and allow breaks.

'British Airways will always have two pilots flying at any one time but will have three and sometimes four pilots on its long-haul services, such as Singapore and Buenos Aires,' he explains.

'The heavy pilot takes turns flying, allowing one of the other pilots to take a break.'

The Director

No, it's not in reference to the film industry - it's the name applied to certain air traffic controllers who align and space out arriving jets at a busy airport.

When you hear it while on board your flight, it's nearly time to land.

The Sin Bin

This refers to 'an area of the taxiways near a runway where an aircraft may be sent to wait out of the way of other aircraft', according to Mark.

A plane will typically be sent here if a flight has a time restriction on its departure caused by the direction of flight being busier than that of other aircraft or because there's inclement weather at the destination.

Tracks

'It's a general term for the thick, highly trafficked belt of routes between Europe and North America,' Mark explains.

'The jet streams change their strength and position by the hour, day and season and so wind-optimised tracks are designed anew each day and night.'

Fixed link

This is an instance of when a crew, which is flying multiple flights on the same day, will remain on the same aircraft at their home base.

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But it's not as bad as it sounds.

'Crews may prefer these to moving through the terminal to another aircraft,' Mark adds.

All-call

This refers to part of the arming/disarming procedure, which ensures that the emergency exit and the slides are functioning appropriately.

'It's a request that each flight attendant report via intercom from his or her station,' explains Patrick Smith, pilot and author of Cockpit Confidential: Everything You Need to Know About Air Travel - Questions, Answers, and Reflections.

'It's sort of a flight attendant conference call.'

Flight level

'There's a technical definition, but I'm not going to bore you with it,' Patrick tells MailOnline Travel.

'Basically, this is a fancy way of telling you how many thousands of feet you are above sea level.'

To decode it for yourself, just add a couple of zeros.

For example, flight level three-three-zero would be 33,000 feet.

EFC time

This refers to the expected further clearance time, also called a release time.

'It's the point at which a crew expects to be set free from a holding pattern or exempted from a ground stop,' Patrick says.

But it's different from the wheels-up time, which is when a plane is expected to be completely airborne.

Ramp

It refers to the aircraft and ground vehicle movement areas closest to the terminal.

So, in other words, if your suitcase gets crushed on the ramp - it means it just barely made it off the plane.

This phrase dates back to the early days of aviation, according to Patrick.

'Back then, if a plane wasn't flying, it was either on the water or it was "on the ramp",' he says.

17 JANUARY 2016

SOURCE: DAILY MAIL
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