

ALL I NEED IS THE AIR THAT I BREATHE....

Many of you may have felt unwell after travelling and will have viewed the BBC Panorama programme (Something in the Air) with interest. Barbara and Mike Jenkinson have informed me about the following website which deals with the subject of "toxic" air. The website is <http://www.aerotoxic.org/> and, for those of you without Internet access, I have summarised some of their content below:

What are aerotoxic fumes?

The synthetic engine oils contain chemicals of the Organo Phosphate (OP) group of compounds, added as anti-wear agents. For instance, Mobil Jet Oil II (which is used by over 50% of jet engine manufacturers), is labelled as containing the OP tri cresyl phosphate (TCP), a known toxin. This is just one of a cocktail of chemicals (some 200) in the oil fumes, many of which are thought to combine in a synergistic way to create the dangerous aerotoxins. Just as with Gulf War Syndrome and sheep dippers, these will not affect everyone, but can have a devastating effect on those people who are susceptible. At present there is no way of telling who these people will be, yet nothing has been done to stop the contamination of cabin air supply. In fact, a 2004 study by Dr Mackenzie - Ross of UCL estimated that up to 197,000 passengers may have been exposed to fumes on board aircraft in that year, on British flights alone.

Where do aerotoxic fumes come from?

Aircrew and passengers on jet airliners can be exposed to highly toxic contaminants through the cabin air supply. Due to the thinness of the air at altitude, aeroplanes need a constant supply of compressed air for the cabin. The engines also need compressed air for efficient combustion of the fuel, and as this is a convenient source for the cabin air, some of it is bled (hence "Bleed Air") directly from the engines ahead of the combustion chamber and piped via the air conditioning system into the cabins. The trouble is, this bleed air is unfiltered and sometimes becomes contaminated with hot engine oil.

What do aerotoxic fumes do?

Numerous studies have been undertaken in recent years with a growing number of published papers providing evidence of serious health effects. A brief list of symptoms from a single exposure includes: Blurred or tunnel vision; disorientation; shaking and tremors; loss of balance and vertigo; seizures; loss of consciousness; memory impairment; headache; light-headedness; dizziness; confusion and feeling intoxicated; nausea; eye irritation; vomiting; cough; breathing difficulties (shortness of breath); tightness in chest; respiratory failure requiring oxygen; increased heart rate and palpitations; irritation of eyes, nose and upper airways.

Now imagine how many times worse the symptoms are from repeated exposure which, of course, includes the air-crew!

If you want to find out more either visit their website or contact
John Hoyte, BM Aerotoxic Association, LONDON WC1N 3XX.

Ed - if you would like to bring information to the notice of the Asociación members then please contact me and I will try to include it in the Newsletter.