

Airline Cleaning Crews Go on Strike Over Exposure to Blood, Vomit and Other Ebola Risks

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More than 200 cabin cleaners working at New York's LaGuardia Airport walked off the job on Wednesday in protest of what they say are poor working conditions.

Citing the escalating Ebola scare as the straw that broke the camel's back, the employees of Air Serv, which contracts with major airlines to clean their planes between flights, say they refuse to clean blood, vomit and other possibly contaminated bodily fluids without adequate protection.

Reports indicate that these and other safety concerns were present long before Ebola, but that this latest threat sealed the deal for demanding improvements. Organized by the 32BJ Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the strike is expected to last 24 hours, reports *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ).

"The whole country is shivering, worried about the problems of Ebola," stated Hector Figueroa, president of the union, to the media. "Airport workers are on the front line of protecting the public, to protect the public, we have to protect the workers."

Not yet members of any union, the workers are now seeking to form their own to address the situation. Full protective gear that guards against infectious disease transmission is necessary, they say, to effectively and safely do their jobs.

"These workers are essentially treated like the garbage that they have to handle every day," added Figueroa. "They're given no equipment, no tools, no training that is appropriate for the kind of challenges that we need for our airport to be safe for passengers and workers alike."

Plane cleaners aren't being properly trained, increasing Ebola risk

Part of the problem is that cabin cleaners are pulled by multiple contractors from a wide network of employees, and not all of them are being properly trained. This is causing inconsistencies and possible hazards with regard to worker and passenger safety.

According to the WSJ, several [workers](#) from at least three major airports in the New York area have filed complaints about improper training activities that are putting them at risk. But without a single union to represent them all, addressing these complaints is difficult.

"What we're hearing is that workers are not aware of this additional gear," stated Mark Catlin, director of occupational health and safety at the SIEU, to reporters, referring to the

hazmat suits needed to protect against [Ebola](#).

“We’re not going to do the comprehensive training that these airport workers need [but] we want to show them the CDC guidance and what this new protective gear looks like....”

Cabin crews being told to just wash their hands, wear rubber gloves

Many cabin crew workers aren’t up to date on the latest news, claimed one of them to the WSJ, so many are unaware that handling a possible source of Ebola requires additional care. Simple rubber gloves and face masks, which is all that many workers have been told is necessary, simply won’t [work](#).

“We do need the training because on the job the only thing they told us yesterday was that we wash our hands, use gloves and masks,” stated the man, known as Alberto Grant Jr., during a WSJ conference call with SEIU.

Another cabin crew worker, 23-year-old Joel Castillo, agrees. He told the WSJ that body suits and durable gloves are needed, not the paper-like gloves that he and his co-workers are currently given, which he says “rip easily.”

“If it wasn’t for Ebola, we’d still be striking,” he stated. “But we have heightened concerns because of it.”

Learn all these details and more at the FREE online Pandemic Preparedness course at www.BioDefense.com

Sources:

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