Beat: News

FBI Warns Tennesseans About Sexual Assaults on Airplanes

FBI Memphis Press Release

Memphis, Tennessee, 20.06.2022, 07:38 Time

USPA NEWS - The FBI Memphis Field Office, which covers middle and west Tennessee, is warning Tennesseans about a serious federal crime: sexual assault aboard aircraft.

“As summer is upon us and more people are flying, the FBI expects to see an increase in reported sexual assaults,” said Special Agent in Charge Douglas Korneski of the FBI Memphis Field Office. “Sexual assault aboard aircraft is a federal felony. Anyone who believes they have been sexually assaulted is encouraged to alert a member of the flight crew.”

In each of the FBI’s 56 field offices, airport liaison agents (ALA) are assigned to the nearly 450 U.S. aviation facilities that have passenger screening operations regulated by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). The ALAs respond to crime aboard aircraft, a violation which falls within the FBI’s special investigative jurisdiction.

When do sexual assaults aboard aircraft occur?

In-flight sexual assaults generally occur on longer flights and when the cabin is dark. The victims are usually in middle or window seats, sleeping, and covered with a blanket or jacket. Victims report waking up to find the perpetrator’s hands inside their clothing or underwear. Many passengers may consume alcohol or take prescription drugs to relax or sleep, and this can both lend a false sense of security and may tempt offenders who find these victims vulnerable. In addition, offenders are known to take advantage of the fact that some victims might not report an incident because they are embarrassed, don’t want to cause a scene, or may try to convince themselves the assault was accidental.

Passengers are encouraged to take the following precautions before and during a flight:

Offenders will often test their victims, sometimes pretending to brush against them to see how they react or if they wake up. If such behavior occurs, establish boundaries and consider asking to be moved to another seat.
Recognize that mixing alcohol with sleeping pills or other medication on an overnight flight increases your risk.
If your seatmate is a stranger, no matter how polite he or she may seem, keep the armrest between you down.
If you are arranging for a child to fly unaccompanied, try to reserve an aisle seat so flight attendants can keep a closer watch on them. Minors are known targets.
If an incident happens, report it immediately to the flight crew and ask that they record the attacker’s identity and report the incident. They can alert law enforcement, if necessary.

Notification to law enforcement:

Timely notification to law enforcement is key. Crime aboard aircraft is more difficult to investigate once days, or even hours, have passed following the incident since witnesses depart and recollections fade. If alerted in advance, FBI agents can be on hand when the plane lands to conduct interviews and take subjects into custody. FBI victim specialists can respond as well because victims of federal crimes are entitled by law to a variety of services. If law enforcement is not able to respond on the ground, victims are encouraged after landing to contact the nearest FBI office.

The FBI Memphis Field Office can be reached 24 hours a day at 901-747-4300. Tips can also be submitted online at tips.fbi.gov.

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