



Interagency Aviation Accident Prevention Bulletin



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Subject: Lithium Batteries

Area of Concern: Flight Safety

Distribution: All Aviation Operations

Discussion: Lithium batteries are routinely carried aboard interagency aircraft in the form of Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs), power banks, handheld radios, laptops, tablets, UAS, cameras, and scientific field equipment. While generally safe when properly manufactured and handled, damaged or defective lithium batteries can experience thermal runaway, resulting in rapid heat generation, fire, toxic smoke, and the release of flammable gases.

Interagency aviation guidance has previously addressed lithium battery hazards (IA APB 12-02 and IA APB 18-06). However, the number, size, and operational dependence on lithium battery-powered equipment has increased significantly over the past decade, increasing the likelihood of batteries being transported during aviation operations.

Several recent commercial airline events involving lithium battery fires have resulted in smoke-filled cabins, emergency diversions, and aircraft damage. A recent SAFECOM report, [#25-1353](#) demonstrated how prompt recognition and response can successfully mitigate a lithium battery event before it escalates. FAA Safety Alert [SAFO25002](#) similarly emphasizes the need for planning, training, and appropriate mitigation strategies.

Although lithium battery failures are relatively uncommon, the consequences in an aircraft can be severe. Flight crews and passengers should be familiar with the warning signs of thermal runaway and understand appropriate response actions before flight.

Prevention

To help prevent accidents involving lithium batteries during aviation operations, personnel should avoid transporting batteries or rechargeable equipment that are damaged, swollen, leaking, overheating, or exhibiting signs of malfunction. It is important to protect exposed battery terminals from short circuits by using original packaging, terminal covers, or protective cases whenever possible. Additionally, steps should be taken to prevent batteries from coming into contact with metal objects that could bridge terminals and cause a hazardous situation. Only the number of spare batteries needed for the mission should be carried, and all applicable hazardous materials requirements and agency policies must be followed. Refer to [NWCG Standards for Aviation Transport of Hazardous Materials, PMS 513 | NWCG](#).

Recognition

Personnel should be alert for signs of a damaged or failing lithium battery. Warning signs may include a swollen or expanding battery pack, excessive heat from a device or battery, unusual chemical, sweet, burning, or acrid odors, hissing or popping sounds, sparking, smoke, or the visible venting of gases. Any of these indications should be treated as a potential thermal runaway event and addressed immediately.

In-Flight Response:

1. Notify the pilot immediately.
2. Disconnect power and turn off the affected device, if possible.
3. Fight fire with available extinguishers to extinguish flames.
4. Isolate the device from combustible materials.
5. Place the device in a fire containment bag if available and it is safe to do so. *
6. Continuously cool the device using water or other aqueous nonflammable liquid.
7. The pilot in command should execute smoke and fume elimination procedures if necessary.
8. Continue monitoring the device for re-ignition.
9. Portable fire extinguishers may suppress flames from a lithium battery fire, but they do not stop thermal runaway. Continuous cooling is often necessary to prevent re-ignition. This may require an immediate landing or removing the device from the aircraft even sooner.

*Note: The FAA has not created technical standards nor certified any specific Lithium Fire Containment Bags. Many fire containment products are manufactured under the UL 5800 Standard for Battery Fire Containment Products and may be purchased from aviation suppliers.



References

- FAA Safety Alert [SAFO 09013](#) Fighting Fires Caused by Lithium Batteries in PEDs
- [IA-APB 12-02 Lithium Batteries](#)
- [IA APB 18-06 UAS Batteries](#)
- [NWCG Standards for Aviation Transport of Hazardous Materials, PMS 513](#)

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