

US bans Samsung Galaxy Note 7 on all flights due to fire hazard

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Washington: In response to reports of the phones catching fire, the United States has issued an order to ban passengers and flight crews from bringing Samsung Galaxy Note 7 smartphones on airline flights.

File pic of exploded Samsung Galaxy Note 7

In its order, the Department of Transportation said that the phones may not be carried on board or packed in checked bags on flights to and from the United States or within the country.

Passengers caught attempting to travel with the phones will have the phones confiscated and may face fines, the department said.

The phones also can't be shipped as air cargo, it added.

Samsung has recalled more than 2.5 million (25 lakh) of the smartphones, citing a battery manufacturing error. The South Korean company discontinued the product earlier this week, less than two months after its August release.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission says there have been nearly 100 reports of batteries in Note 7 phones overheating in the US. One fire erupted on a Southwest Airlines flight earlier this month.

In another case, a family in St. Petersburg, Florida, reported a Galaxy Note 7 phone left charging in their Jeep caught fire, destroying the vehicle.

The Federal Aviation Administration had previously warned passengers not to pack the phones in their checked bags and to power them off and not charge them while on board planes.

"We recognize that banning these phones from airlines will inconvenience some passengers, but the safety of all those aboard an aircraft must take priority," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

"We are taking this additional step because even one fire incident in flight poses a high risk of severe personal injury and puts many lives at risk," Foxx added.

Samsung said in a statement that it is working with the department to make customers aware of the ban. The company also urged Note 7 customers to get a refund or exchange their phones by visiting their phone service provider or retail store.

The Note 7 isn't the only gadget to catch fire thanks to lithium-battery problems, which have afflicted everything from laptops to Tesla cars to Boeing's 787 jetliner. At least three US airlines are adding new fire-suppression equipment to fleets in case a cellphone or laptop battery overheats, catches on fire and can't be extinguished.

Rechargeable lithium batteries are more susceptible to overheating than other types of batteries if they are exposed to high temperatures, are damaged or have manufacturing flaws.

Once overheating starts, it can lead to "thermal runaway" in which temperatures continue escalating to very high levels. Water can extinguish the flames, but doesn't always halt the thermal runaway. Flames will often reappear after initially being quenched.

- With AP Inputs