

MATCH TIPS for New Collectors

by "Billboard Bill" Thomas

Matches and airplanes! They don't mix well. Fire anywhere can be deadly, but at least on land or at sea one can get away from a fire. In the air, you and a fire are looked into the same pressurized tin can, so it is no wonder that airlines and the FAA treat matches with special attention.

The rules of the FAA are quite simple—NO loose matches in one's checked or carry-on baggage. NO strike-anywhere matches nowhere, nohow, but safety matches can be carried on one's person. To us males, On One's Person means in a pocket. The rules don't say if 20 or 30 matchbooks in a pocket is overstretching the risk. But what about the ladies? Well, on a lady's person is assumed to mean in her pockets OR her purse, right? But what is her purse? Isn't it just a small piece of carry-on baggage? Sure it is—some women's purposes are considerably larger than a man's small attache case. And yet, she can carry lots of matchbooks onto a plane in her purse while I can't do the same in my attache. Hey, that's discrimination! Try to get the FAA to explain their rationale for this. They'll explain it in many weasel-words, but you won't get a sensible, rational answer.

In our last issue, editor Mike Prero spoke of consulting with American Airlines about matches in baggage, and their answer to him scared us. In it, they implied that matches in carry-on baggage would cause one to be left at the gate, but that it would be OK to check the baggage containing the matches...doesn't that scare you, too? No mention is made of packing the matchbooks tightly, or even that they must be safety matches.

Let's consider two bags with safety matches in them—one is checked and goes into the passenger hold, and the other one, on another flight, is carried aboard. Which is the greater hazard? Well, consider that there is little control of the temperature in the hold, and that there is NO

smoke or fire detector and NO fire extinguishing system for the hold.

On the other flight, the carried-on bag containing matches is in the overhead bin or on the floor beneath the seat in front of the passenger. If it should become ignited, the owner (and many others) will see and smell the fire and the alert flight attendant will drop her tray of crummy box lunches and grab the fire extinguisher. You and other passengers will grab Cokes from the beverage cart and squirt them at the burning bag, just don't throw your Scotch on the rocks, as that could be disastrous. So a fire in carry-on baggage, whether it be from matches or from anything, is more quickly detectable and more easily fightable than one in a check bag down in the cargo hold. Agreed?

Okay, so let's make a rule—matchbooks should be in carry-on bags, not in checked bags. Assuming we could invoke such a rule, would we be safe from matches in the baggage hold? No way, for down there in the hold are many sacks full of US mail, and among those sacks are full caddies of MATCHES, properly enclosed in foil-lined caddy mailers. The caddy mailer meets postal mail regulations, and we assume that the FAA knows the nature of the mail that the PO places aboard airplanes. So, let's forget our new rule and just say small amounts of full matchbooks should be carried on the person—in pockets or purse, and larger amounts should be fully packed caddies in foil-lined mailers or wrapped with metal foil. If you have such a wrapped caddy in your carry-on bag, be prepared to have it inspected, as the box will show up as a big, dark square something on the security X-ray screen.

Above all, don't be careless or casual with matchbooks in your air luggage...even if you don't care about your own survival, consider that I, too, might be on your flight.

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