Alaska Airlines introduces new rules for emotional support animals

New policy aims to increase safety for employees, flyers and service animals

SEATTLE, April 19, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Alaska Airlines today announced a new policy for guests flying with emotional support and psychiatric service animals.

For tickets purchased on or after May 1, guests traveling with emotional support or psychiatric service animals must provide animal health and behavioral documents, as well as a signed document from a medical doctor or mental health professional, at least 48 hours in advance of departure. The change does not apply to Alaska's policy for traditional service animals.

"Alaska is committed to providing accessible services to guests with disabilities and ensuring a safe environment for all flyers," said Ray Prentice, Alaska Airlines' director of customer advocacy. "We are making these changes now based on a number of recent incidents where the inappropriate behavior of emotional support animals has impacted and even injured our employees, other guests and service animals."

In recent years, the overall number of emotional support and psychiatric service animals traveling on Alaska Airlines has increased dramatically. Every day, approximately 150 emotional support and psychiatric service animals travel on Alaska Airlines.

"Most animals cause no problems," said Prentice. "However, over the last few years, we have observed a steady increase in incidents from animals who haven't been adequately trained to behave in a busy airport setting or on a plane, which has prompted us to strengthen our policy." Alaska Airlines consulted with its disability advisory board and disability advocacy groups to ensure that the expanded policy accommodates guests with disabilities.

New Policy

For new bookings made on or after May 1, 2018, guests traveling with emotional support and psychiatric service animals must email or fax Alaska Airlines three completed documents, which will be available on alaskaair.com starting April 30:

1. Animal Health Advisory Form – On this form the flyer acknowledges Alaska Airlines' recommendation that all emotional support and psychiatric service animals travel with a veterinary-issued health certificate.
2. Mental Health Form – Currently required, this is a letter issued by a mental health professional or medical doctor approving the use of an emotional support and psychiatric service animals.
3. Animal Behavior Form – A signed affidavit affirming the emotional support or psychiatric service animal is trained to behave in public and that the owner accepts all liability for any injuries or damage to property.
Additionally, just like traditional service animals, emotional support and psychiatric service animals must be well-behaved in a public setting and under the control of their owner or handler at all times.

Guests with tickets purchased after May 1 who do not submit the required documentation 48 hours in advance, will be offered to fly with their pet under existing policies for travel in the cabin or in the temperature-controlled cargo compartment. Existing fleet and breed restrictions, as well as health certificate requirements, will apply. Learn more here.

Alaska Airlines, together with Virgin America and its regional partners, flies 44 million guests a year to more than 115 destinations with an average of 1,200 daily flights across the United States and to Mexico, Canada and Costa Rica. With Alaska and Alaska Global Partners, guests can earn and redeem miles on flights to more than 900 destinations worldwide. Learn about Alaska's award-winning service at newsroom.alaskaair.com and blog.alaskaair.com. Alaska Airlines, Virgin America and Horizon Air are subsidiaries of Alaska Air Group (NYSE: ALK).

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