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Hot Weather Can Stifle Airplane Takeoffs: Cameron on Transportation

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Is it hot enough for ya?

Even if you don't believe it's caused by humans, there is no doubt our planet is heating up. And as global warming increases, so will our travel problems.

Meteorologists agree that thunderstorms, tornados and hurricanes are all getting stronger and causing greater damage. Hardly a summer passes without extensive flight delays caused by storm-fronts, let alone hurricanes like Harvey and Maria.

A stronger jet-stream also means slower going when flying west and bumpier flights at many altitudes. Clearly, our weather patterns are changing. But increasing temperatures are also affecting the airlines in other ways.

Last summer there were days when it was literally [too hot in Phoenix for planes to fly](#). It was just a matter of physics: the 120 degree air was too thin to allow some planes to get enough lift to go airborne.

American Airlines' CRJ jets' performance charts say the regional jets cannot fly in temperatures over 118 degrees. Of course, those planes' Canadian manufacturer (Canadair) may not have considered this a possibility during design, let alone an issue. In cold weather the air is heavier and thicker and planes can easily take off, eh?

Larger planes like Boeing's 737 and Airbus' A320 could still get airborne in Phoenix as their maximum operating temperature was 126 degrees.

One Columbia University professor says this problem is not unique to the desert southwest. Even at New York's LaGuardia and DC's Ronald Reagan airports, the shorter runways mean planes must often be "weight restricted" on hot summer days. Professor Radley Horton says since 1980 there has been a 20-30 percent increase in planes being forced to bump passengers, fuel or cargo to get airborne,

A few years ago I was on a supposedly non-stop flight from LGA to Kansas City, an easy enough three-hour flight. But on that hot summer day the old Midwest Express DC-9 we were on was forced to make a stop in Milwaukee to refuel before continuing to KC, turning the trip into almost six hours.

Internationally, torrid cities like Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong are all expected to see flight delays or weight restrictions. And high altitude destinations like Denver, where the air is already thinner, will also suffer.

The industry trade journal Travel Weekly says Boeing's 787 Dreamliner will be most likely to face restrictions because it flies farther and needs more fuel. But Airbus' double-deck A380 will be less affected as it usually flies only to major airports with long runways.

And, by the way, I should also note that aviation is suffering this problem partly out of its own creation: airplanes contribute [2% of all the carbon dioxide](#) produced each year.

What's the answer to this hot issue?

Well, maintaining on-time flight schedules may mean avoiding take-offs in the 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. part of the day when the temps are the highest. But tell that to the busy executive who doesn't want to wait for sundown to get home!

Alternatively, aircraft makers like Boeing and Airbus could design planes with better lift equipped with

stronger engines, to overcome the hottest conditions. But those planes won't be ready for decades.

Or, of course, we could just try solving the problem of global warming. But that's probably too late.

See also Jim Cameron's other articles on air transportation:

- [Air Marshal Service, Created to Prevent Trouble, Is Itself Troubled: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 17)
 - [Look! Up in the Air!! And on the Train!!! Another Disruptive Passenger!!!! — Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 14)
 - [By 2020 You'll Need a 'Verified' Drivers License If You Want It for ID Before a Flight: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Dec. 17, 2017)
 - [Check Out This Airline If You're Going to France: Cameron on Transportation](#) (July 28, 2017)
 - [Think Air Travel's Crazy? You Don't Know the Half of It: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Oct. 7, 2017)
 - [Cramming Passengers on Planes Is Not Just Uncomfortable, It's Also Unsafe](#) (May 19, 2017)
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