

The Virgin Islands Consortium

American Airlines Hit with Record \$4.1 Million Fine Over Tarmac Delays

Travel / **Published On August 29, 2023 07:06 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **August 29, 2023**



The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has slapped American Airlines with a hefty fine of \$4.1 million for multiple violations of federal laws governing tarmac delays. The fine represents the largest fine ever issued for such violations and DOT said its part of a broader effort to protect air travelers, which has included returning more than \$2.5 billion in refunds.

"This is the latest action in our continued drive to enforce the rights of airline passengers," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. "Whether the issue is extreme tarmac delays or problems getting refunds, DOT will continue to protect consumers and hold airlines accountable."

An investigation by DOT's Office of Aviation Consumer Protection (OACP) revealed that between 2018 and 2021, American Airlines allowed 43 domestic flights to remain on the tarmac for extended periods without letting passengers deplane. Most of these incidents occurred at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport and affected a total of 5,821 passengers. DOT found that none of the exceptions to the tarmac delay rule applied to these flights.

Of the \$4.1 million fine, \$2.05 million will be credited back to the airline for compensation already provided to affected passengers. DOT encourages this practice so that civil penalties can be used to compensate passengers directly.

Monday's fine is part of a wider Biden administration effort to expand rights and protections for air travelers, DOT said. Earlier this year, the department initiated rulemaking requiring airlines to provide compensation for amenities such as meals and hotels when passengers are stranded. The department has also been working on improving transparency around ancillary fees and pushing airlines to provide fee-free family seating.

Mr. Buttigieg has been particularly active in advocating for fee-free family seating. Three airlines have already committed to this practice, and DOT is pursuing rulemaking to make it mandatory.

The DOT is also working on a rulemaking proposal that would codify airlines' obligation to provide refunds for canceled or significantly changed flights. The proposed rule seeks to clarify what constitutes a 'significant change,' which would entitle a consumer to a refund.

For more information on aviation consumer protection and to understand your rights, you can visit the DOT's [website](#). Complaints against airlines can also be filed directly with the department.