



THE UNITED STATES  
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United States Attorney's Office  
District of Oregon

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**Off-Duty Commercial Airline Pilot Charged in Federal Court for Interfering with Flight Crew**

PORTLAND, Ore.—An off-duty commercial airline pilot, who was arrested on Sunday after he attempted to shut down the engines of passenger plane in flight, has been charged in federal court.

Joseph David Emerson, 44, of Pleasant Hill, California, has been charged by criminal complaint with one count of interfering with flight crew members and attendants.

According to court documents, on October 22, 2023, Port of Portland police officers responded to a report of inbound aircraft that had diverted from its route between Everett, Washington, and San Francisco to Portland International Airport due to an inflight disturbance. Police dispatch reported that Emerson, an off-duty Alaska Airlines pilot seated in a cockpit jump seat, had attempted to shut down the plane's engines during flight.

After landing, responding officers interviewed the two pilots. The pilots recounted that, approximately halfway between Astoria, Oregon, and Portland, after engaging with them in casual conversation, Emerson attempted to grab and pull two red fire handles that would have activated the plane's emergency fire suppression system and cut off fuel to its engines. After a brief physical struggle with the pilots, Emerson exited the cockpit.

Flight attendants placed Emerson in wrist restraints and seated him in the rear of the aircraft. During the flight's descent, Emerson tried to grab the handle of an emergency exit. A flight attendant stopped him by placing her hands on top of his.

After landing in Portland, Emerson was arrested without further incident and booked into the Multnomah County Detention Center on multiple state charges of attempted murder and reckless endangerment. He remains in custody in Multnomah County on a federal hold pending his first appearance in federal court on a later date.

This case was investigated by the FBI and Port of Portland Police Department. It is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon.

A criminal complaint is only an accusation of a crime, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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