



Kathleen S. Duret, a stewardess, tells of events preceding and following crash of a United jetliner near Midway last Dec. 8. (Daily News Photo/Bill DeLuga)

Smoke hood could have saved lives in air crash: FAA

By Dennis Sodomka
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Smoke hoods recommended four years ago by the Federal Aviation Administration but never installed by commercial airlines could have saved some of the 45 lives lost in the crash of a United Air Lines plane near Midway Airport, a new FAA study suggests.

The deaths of 40 of the Midway crash victims were attributed to smoke inhalation and burns rather than to injuries received when the Boeing 737 jet smashed into several bun-

galows at 70th Pl. and S. Hamlin.

Deadly carbon monoxide and cyanide gases are generated by burning plastics inside airplanes, according to the study completed late last month by the FAA's Office of Aviation Medicine.

THE FAA STUDY is among the exhibits prepared for the National Transportation Safety Board hearings on the Dec. 8 Midway disaster. The hearings opened Tuesday at the Shera-

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ton-O'Hare Motor Hotel near O'Hare Airport.

In January, 1969, the FAA recommended adoption of a rule that would have made smoke hoods (portable plastic devices) mandatory on all airliners. But airlines resisted the new ruling, according to the study, complaining that the individual hoods would be easily stolen and that explaining how to use them would "burden" flight crews.

The FAA retracted its recommendation in August, 1970, but smoke hoods have been installed on some private jets and on lower decks of some U.S. Navy ships.

Analysis of the bodies of the 45 victims of the Midway crash

and the 10 victims of a Dec. 20 crash at O'Hare showed that many of the dead had high levels of cyanide or carbon monoxide in their blood.

THE FAA researchers didn't attribute all of the deaths to the gases, but noted that half the fatal amount of the combined substances would incapacitate a victim in just 60 seconds.

This suggests that at least some of the persons burned beyond recognition in the Midway accident and other crashes lost consciousness while there still was time to get out of the burning planes.

The FAA study recommends two steps to combat the effects of the deadly gases.

The first is to install portable

smoke hoods for each passenger seat. The hoods were originally developed by FAA scientists.

The second recommendation is to refit planes with fixtures made of new plastics that release less cyanide when burned. The study noted that this would be an expensive, long-range procedure.

KATHLEEN S. Duret, one of three stewardesses who survived the Midway crash, testified Wednesday that she ran to the left exit door after the crash, opened it, and saw that the plane "had settled over the basement door of a house."

Mrs. Duret said she then hurried back into the plane's cabin, where "what had been Row 15 was a jumble of seats."

"People were coming out," she said, "but I can't say they were coming through the aisle because there didn't seem to be an aisle."

MRS. D. JEANNE Griffin, a stewardess in the coach section, said dense, black smoke filled the cabin within minutes.

She described it as "thick and heavy — it seemed to have weight to it. If you inhaled it, it just wouldn't go down your throat."

Mrs. Griffin said she helped several passengers escape from the darkened cabin.



Mrs. D. Jeanne Griffin, one of three stewardesses aboard the United Air Lines jetliner that crashed near Midway Airport Dec. 8; Delta Air Lines Capt. Hugh E. Murphy, and Chicago Fire Capt. Arthur C. Munin at crash hearings Wednesday. (Daily News Photos/Bill DeLuga)