

# Oil fumes on board: How to know and what to do

Engine oil fumes can contaminate the cabin and flight deck air supply systems on all aircraft types. It is very important to limit your exposure because the fumes are highly toxic and can cause both acute and chronic health problems.

This is what you need to know:

1. If oil fumes contaminate the cabin air supply, you may smell and see fumes, or you may not.
2. If you do smell fumes, they won't necessarily smell like oil. Many people think they smell like dirty socks. Others say "chemicals," "old cheese," "wet dog," "heated garbage," and so on. Boeing has reported that BP2197 engine oil fumes have a characteristic "electrical smell," often mistaken for electrical faults.
3. If you smell what could be oil fumes and are already onboard, quickly verify that nobody is cooking anything smelly, that the coffee pots are not burning, that the cabin lights are working and not burned out, and that the galley chiller lights are not indicating malfunction (red).
4. Tell the flight deck that it appears that engine oil has contaminated the supply air. Describe anything you see/smell, plus any symptoms, and report that you have ruled out other sources in the cabin (if applicable).
5. If fumes are present prior to pushback, ask the flight deck to have maintenance check the aircraft prior to dispatch. If fumes are present during taxi, make sure the flight deck knows. If fumes are present inflight, ask the flight deck to ensure that maintenance checks the aircraft immediately upon landing. (The pilots may initiate a diversion or return to base.)

If you require further assistance in the matter, please contact your local CUPE H&S committee.