

Southwest Airlines Unveils New Charger Policy Amid Concerns Over Lithium-Ion Battery Fires

The airline will require passengers to keep their portable chargers in plain sight during flights.



By [Katabella Roberts](#)

Southwest Airlines will soon require passengers to keep their portable chargers visible while using them, amid concerns over an increasing number of lithium-ion battery fires on board flights.

A spokesperson for the Texas-based carrier told The Epoch Times in an emailed statement that using portable charging devices while stored in a bag or overhead bin will no longer be permitted.

“In the rare event a lithium battery overheats or catches fire, quick access is critical, and keeping power banks in plain sight allow for faster intervention and helps protect everyone onboard,” the spokesperson said.

The policy is set to go into effect on May 28, though some passengers may have already seen notifications about the rule when using the airline’s app, the spokesperson noted.

The carrier will allow the chargers to be stored inside carry-on bags when they aren’t in use, they added.

“Nothing is more important to Southwest than the safety of its customers and employees,” the spokesperson said.

Southwest is set to become the first carrier in the United States to implement the new policy.

Some international airlines, including Korean Airlines, Singapore Airlines, and Thai Airways, already have similar rules in place following a number of incidents involving lithium-ion battery fires on planes.

That includes the devastating fire aboard an Air Busan passenger plane waiting to take off from an airport in South Korea in January. All 176 people on board were safely evacuated, authorities said.

Lithium batteries are required to undergo safety testing; however, they are capable of overheating and undergoing a process called thermal runaway, according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The process can occur without warning due to a number of issues, including damage to the battery, overheating, improper packing, and exposure to water, the agency says.

Thermal runaway can also occur on its own due to manufacturing defects, according to the FAA.

There have already been nine air incidents involving lithium-ion batteries carried as cargo or baggage this year, including six in January alone, according to FAA statistics.

That follows 44 last year, according to the FAA. Both figures are down from a high of 64 in 2022, the data show.

When compared to the roughly 180,000 flights that U.S. airlines operate each week, the number of incidents is still relatively small, and lithium batteries can overheat anywhere. However, such incidents are of growing concern for airlines, particularly in light of a number of recent events on U.S. flights.

Last summer, a smoking laptop in a passenger's bag prompted an evacuation on an American Airlines flight headed to Miami from San Francisco International Airport. That incident left one person with minor injuries while the remaining passengers on board were evacuated safely.

In 2023, a flight departing from Dallas to Orlando, Florida, was forced to make an emergency landing in Jacksonville, Florida, after a passenger's battery caught fire in an overhead bin. The plane landed safely, but several passengers on board were taken to the hospital after feeling ill.

The Transportation Security Administration has long prohibited e-cigarettes and chargers and power banks with lithium-ion batteries in checked bags, but it allows them in carry-on bags.

Experts have long recommended passengers keep rechargeable devices within reach on board flights, and the FAA advises travelers to notify flight crew immediately if their lithium batteries or devices are showing signs of overheating, expanding, smoking, or burning.

Flight crews are trained to recognize and respond to lithium battery fires in the cabin, according to the FAA.