



THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

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Off-Duty Commercial Airline Pilot Pleads Guilty to Interfering with Flight Crew

PORTLAND, Ore.—Joseph David Emerson, 46, of Pleasant Hill, California, an off-duty commercial airline pilot, pleaded guilty today for attempting to shut down the engines of a passenger plane in flight.

According to court documents, on October 22, 2023, Emerson, an off-duty Alaska Airlines pilot seated in a cockpit jump seat, attempted to shut down the engines of a commercial passenger plane traveling from Everett, Washington, to San Francisco, California. After a brief physical struggle with Emerson, who quickly left the cockpit, the pilots diverted from their route and landed at Portland International Airport. Once on the ground, Port of Portland police officers placed Emerson under arrest.

On October 23, 2023, Emerson was [charged by criminal complaint](#) with interfering with flight crew members and attendants.

Emerson faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and three years of supervised release.

As part of the plea agreement, Emerson has agreed to pay restitution in full to the victims.

Emerson will be sentenced on November 17, 2025, before a U.S. District Court Judge.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, and Port of Portland Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Parakram Singh is prosecuting the case.

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