

Book matches hazardous on aircraft

The Federal Aviation Administration recently warned air travelers that it is dangerous and may be illegal to carry loose book matches in their luggage.

"Matches could ignite in a suitcase and start a smoldering fire that could rein a traveler's personal belongings. Moreover, there always is the danger of a small fire becoming a large one or triggering an explosion on an aircraft in flight," said Robert W. Oliver, chief of the FAA's Air Transportation Security Division, Alaska Region.

A fire can start when the cover of one match book is open and vibration or movement brings the heads of the matches into contact with the striking strip of another book, Oliver said. The usual result is a small, smoldering fire in the suitcase. But in one case an explosion resulted when the smoldering fire ignited the contents of a can of hair spray. Fortunately, the

suitcase was not aboard an airplane at the time.

FAA said that twice in the last two months it has received reports of matches starting fires in luggage. Others may have been started and gone unreported, it added.

In one of the two cases, FAA said, the fire was discovered when a baggage handler noted smoke coming from the suitcase while unloading it from the aircraft. In the other, only two books of matches actually caught fire, but there were 89 other books of matches in the same suitcase that could have been ignited. FAA is not taking action to fine the owner of the suitcase.

The FAA classifies matches as hazardous because the heads are a flammable solid. They can be legally carried on aircraft only when they are tightly packed in a closed container within the suitcase.