

Study: cell calls pose risk to aircraft

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A Carnegie Mellon University study suggests the use of cellular telephones aboard aircraft might affect the plane's instruments, creating a safety hazard.

Researchers from the Pittsburgh university monitored transmissions onboard several flights in the Northeast and found the use of cell phones and other portable electronic devices disrupt the operation of cockpit instruments.

Although the scientists say there's no known instance of an electronic device used by a passenger causing an accident, they said their data suggest use of devices such as cell phones "will, in all likelihood, someday cause an accident by interfering with critical cockpit instruments such as GPS receivers," the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported Wednesday.

Verizon's Airfones, cell phones installed on airplanes more than a decade ago, operate at frequencies that do not interfere with other electronics.

Despite the current ban on cell phone use during flights, the Carnegie Mellon researchers discovered an average one to four cell phone calls are made from every commercial flight in the northeast United States -- some even during takeoff climbs or on final approaches.

The study is featured in an article in the March issue of IEEE Spectrum.

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