

US mulls changes to personal electronics on flights

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Passengers wait in line for a flight at Miami International Airport on April 16, 2013 in Miami, Florida.

US aviation officials are considering easing restrictions on the use of personal electronics like smartphones, laptop computers and e-readers aboard airplanes, a spokesman said Monday.

An [advisory panel](#) is meeting behind closed doors on Tuesday and

Wednesday to finalize its recommendations for the Federal Aviation Administration by the end of this month, according to the FAA.

"The FAA recognizes consumers are intensely interested in the use of personal electronics aboard aircraft," a spokesman said in an email to AFP.

"That is why we tasked a government-industry group to examine the safety issues and the feasibility of changing the current restrictions."

According to current regulations, passengers are barred from using [portable electronics](#) for the entire flight, and are typically asked to turn off these devices for takeoff and landing.

The ban on sending and receiving emails, making calls and using Wi-Fi is based on concerns that the communications might interfere with a plane's [navigation systems](#).

Experts say many of these concerns are outdated, particularly since the FAA last year allowed airlines to replace paper flight manuals in the cockpit with [tablet computers](#).

Phone calls aboard planes are banned by a separate entity, the Federal Communications Commission, and would not be subject to change by the FAA.

Senator Claire McCaskill, a leading advocate for wider use of personal electronics in flight, wrote the FAA in 2012 urging a policy change.

"The public is growing increasingly skeptical of prohibitions on the use of many electronic devices during the full duration of a flight, while at the same time using such devices in increasing numbers," she said.

"The fear of devices that operate on electricity is dated, at best."

The FAA convened the advisory panel last year to review the evidence and update the rules. A final recommendation is expected by the end of September.

"We will wait for the group to finish its work before we determine next steps," the FAA spokesman said.

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