



Airlines have a new weapon in the war against viruses

Envirotech has SMART way to kill bugs

SKELMERSDALE is not renowned as the home of innovation. But tucked away on one of the Lancashire town's trading estates is a little-known company that has developed a world-beating product that will, it is claimed, kill bacteria and viruses that are costing lives all around the world.

Envirotech (UK) has been awarded a SMART Award for Innovation to help to develop its product, Envirocare. The company was conceived by John Egerton and Keith Seymour, its directors, just over a year ago and is receiving orders from a variety of users.

The product is of particular interest to airlines, whose control of airborne bacteria and disease is being questioned.

Last year 168 million passengers passed through UK airports. In a survey of 290 passengers, Liberty Occupational Health found that more than 50 per cent of business travellers experienced some kind of illness and 12 per cent suffered a loss of performance.

An even more alarming claim was made by the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, which said that tuberculosis can be contracted through prolonged exposure to aerosolised droplets dispersed in recycled air.

The Government is also to investigate reports of air passengers and crew being at risk from toxic fumes seeping into cabins from jet engines.

Paul Tyler, the Liberal Democrat MP for North Cornwall, has highlighted purported incidents involving BAe 146 aircraft — a plane used by the Royal Family. "Passengers are in an artificial environment where there may be 20 to 25 per cent less oxygen, equivalent to being at the top of a mountain," he said.

According to the Aviation Health Institute, airlines are subject to little or no regulation regarding the health of their customers.

Sir Magdi Yacoub, the world-famous heart transplant pioneer and chairman of the scientific advisory committee to the institute, commented recently: "Air travel is now a necessity. It is remarkable that the hazards, large or small, have not been adequately defined. This is essential if we are to protect this large sector of the community."

Most airlines say that every-

thing possible is being done to ensure passenger safety. A spokesman for Virgin Atlantic said: "We feel that the quality of air our passengers enjoy is probably better than any other environment they will encounter during the average working day, and we will continue to ensure that we provide the highest level of onboard health and safety for them."

Michael Bageshaw, head of medical services for British Airways, says that he is entirely happy that the filter systems used on BA aircraft will eliminate even the smallest bacteria. He added: "Airborne bacteria and viruses die (and cannot live in carpets and on upholstery) as they need body temperature and moisture to survive."

However, research carried out by Envirotech suggests that this is far from true. The company recently took samples from the airfilter of a Boeing 747 operated by a UK carrier and had them analysed by Aynsome Laboratories, a respected independent research institution.

The tests found a range of micro-organisms present in the filter. Aynsome reported: "The analysis of this air filter has shown that organisms are capable of survival in such a medium. It also raises the question of the potential survival of pathogens, and more importantly, the consequent redistribution of these organisms through the aircraft by the ventilation system."

Aynsome has also carried out independent analysis on Envirocare, which Envirotech (UK) Ltd says can be impregnated into the air filters and will eradicate all such micro-organisms.

Envirotech's Mr Egerton said: "We have been telling the airlines, and other industries such as cruise lines, for some time that they have a problem."

"While some are considering the issue, many are simply ignoring it and putting passengers' health at continued risk."

Airline passenger cabins are not the only likely applications for Envirocare.

Envirotech has teamed up with a plastics manufacturer to develop bacteria- and virus-resistant single-storey housing manufactured in flat packs for Third World countries.

Neil Bromage

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