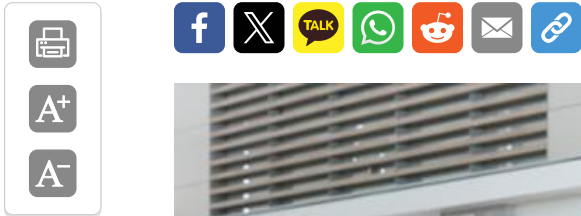


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1st industrial death linked to cosmic radiation recognized



Crewmembers of Korean Air are seen at Incheon International Airport, in this July 21, 2022 file photo. Yonhap

A labor panel has concluded the death of a cancer-stricken flight attendant resulted from exposure to cosmic radiation, marking the first recognition of this type of industrial death.

A disease assessment panel from the state-run Korea Worker's Compensation & Welfare Service reached the conclusion a month earlier in a case involving a former Korean Air flight attendant, surnamed Song, who died from stomach cancer, the company said.

Song served as a flight attendant from 1995-2021, spending nearly 1,022 hours on board a plane each year. Half of the time was dedicated to long-haul flights to the Americas and Europe.

Those routes, which pass over the North Pole, are generally considered to have about five times the normal level of cosmic radiation exposure due to the scarce atmosphere that shields against such radiation.

Cosmic radiation has little effect on passengers who fly occasionally, but safety concerns have been raised for aircrew members who routinely work at high altitudes.

According to the state nuclear safety watchdog, the Nuclear Safety and Security Commission, flight attendants were exposed to an average maximum radiation level of 5.42 millisieverts (mSv) per year between 2017 and 2021, a figure more than five times higher than the normal permissible level of 1 mSv.

Korean Air had argued the company ensured aircrew members were not exposed to radiation exceeding the permissible annual level of 6 mSv. It also claimed that the correlation between Song's cancer and cosmic radiation has not been confirmed.

The panel rejected the claims, concluding that a "considerable" correlation is recognized when considering the victim's accumulated radiation exposure, which could be higher than measured, and other disadvantageous work environments involving long-haul flight schedules. (Yonhap)