

# Consumer News & Views

Published twice monthly

May 1, 2015



## In this Issue...

- Consumer Confidence Drops in April.
- **Are Cramped Airline Seats Dangerous?**
- ACC Annual Business Meeting Scheduled for June 12 in San Diego.
- ACC's *Friend of the Consumer Award* Recognizes Consumer-Friendly Companies.
- Apply for the 2015 Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Program.

## Consumer Confidence Drops in April.

The Conference Board *Consumer Confidence Index*®, which had increased in March, declined in April. The Index now stands at 95.2 (1985=100), down from 101.4 in March.

“Consumer confidence, which had rebounded in March, gave back all of the gain and more in April,” said Lynn Franco, Director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board. “This month’s retreat was prompted by a softening in current conditions, likely sparked by the recent lackluster performance of the labor market, and apprehension about the short-term outlook.”



Consumers’ appraisal of current-day conditions continued to soften. Those saying business conditions are “good” edged down from 26.7 percent to 26.5 percent. However, those claiming business conditions are “bad” also decreased from 19.4 percent to 18.2 percent. Consumers were less favorable in their assessment of the job market.

Thomas Hinton, president of the American Consumer Council, expressed concern about the flat job market and low salaries for college graduates stating, "This is not a good time for the economy to go soft. Thousands of college graduates will soon be flooding the marketplace seeking jobs to launch their careers. We need a more positive jobs environment now, not in three months. Business and government have a moral obligation to create opportunities for these Millennials. We should be inspiring and motivating our best-and-brightest, not turning them off in their search for meaningful work." Hinton added, "Business and government need to partner to create better results."

---

## Are Cramped Airline Seats Dangerous?

Based on an article written by Scott Mayerowitz, AP Airlines Writer

The shrinking space on airplanes is surely uncomfortable, but it might also be dangerous for passengers' health and safety. Planes are filled with more passengers than ever before. Fliers are older and heavier. Flight attendants warn about an increase in air rage, and experts question if having rows of seats packed closer together might make it harder for passengers to evacuate after a crash.



A consumer advisory group set up by the Department of Transportation dove into all those issues recently at a public hearing as part of its role to make non-binding suggestions to government regulators. The American Consumer Council, a non-profit consumer education organization with over 163,000 members, has long been on record as opposing the shrinking airplane seat in order for airlines to maximize profits.

Charlie Leocha, the consumer representative on the committee, said the government sets standards for the conditions for dogs flying as cargo but doesn't dictate minimum space standards for passengers. "In a world where animals have more rights to space and food than humans," Leocha said, "it is time that the DOT and FAA take a stand for humane treatment of passengers."

Fliers last summer squeezed into the least amount of personal space in the history of flying. In July, U.S. airlines sold a record 87.8 percent of seats on domestic flights, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statics. And that figure does not include all the seats occupied by passengers who redeemed frequent flier miles or airline employees flying for free.

"Unfortunately, the days of the empty middle seat are a thing of the past," said Julie Frederick, a representative for the American Airlines flight attendants union.

Following the implementation of checked-bag fees in 2008, Frederick said, more and more passengers are carrying on bags, fighting for overhead bin space. That anger carries over through the flight as passengers bump elbows on armrests and bang their knees against tray tables. She said there are more cases of air rage, many of which go unreported.

Questions were also raised if the increased density of seats means passengers won't be able to evacuate fast enough after a crash. The Federal Aviation Administration runs various tests including how fast passengers can evacuate a plane and how fast they can put on a life preserver.

But Cynthia Corbertt, a human factors researcher with the FAA, testified that it conducts those tests using planes with 31 inches between each row of seats. Many passenger jets today have less legroom. For instance, United Airlines has 30 inches of room, known as pitch, on some jets; Spirit Airlines offers 28 inches. "We just haven't considered other pitches," Corbertt told the Advisory Committee for Aviation Consumer Protection.

Before any new jet is allowed to fly, the manufacturer must prove that everybody can evacuate in 90 seconds with half of the exits blocked. Carry-on baggage is strewn throughout the cabin, and the test is conducted in night-like conditions. However, the cabin is not filled with smoke, and all of the passengers are physically fit, dressed in athletic clothing and know that an evacuation is coming.

"We'd like to see more realistic simulations," Frederick testified. She added that most passengers don't pay attention to pre-flight safety briefings, especially now that they can use electronic devices from gate to gate.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane, who chairs the DOT committee, noted concern that the FAA does not factor in human panic, especially parents who might take extra time to ensure their children are safe before evacuating. "So they aren't the average traveler, quite honestly," Kane said.

On long flights, there is another risk for fliers: deep vein thrombosis, where a blood clot forms, typically in a leg vein. If that clot gets loose and travels into the lungs, it can cause a blockage.

ACC's Thomas Hinton said "Airlines are putting consumers at risk unnecessarily. It's unfair. The Department of Transportation or Congress needs to set some reasonable seat size guidelines as well as leg room requirements between seats."

---

**ACC Annual Business Meeting Scheduled for Friday, June 12, in San Diego.** The American Consumer Council (ACC) has announced its 2015 annual business meeting will be held at the Rancho Bernardo Inn located in San Diego on Friday, June 12, at 10:00 am. Members are welcome to attend. For details, please contact ACC at 1-760-787-0414.

---

### **ACC's *Friend of the Consumer* Award Recognizes Outstanding Businesses in 2015.**

Is your business consumer-friendly? Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers? If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award. Now is the time to apply!

Throughout the year, ACC presents its "Friend of the Consumer" Awards. This prestigious award recognizes manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States that meet or exceed federally-mandated standards and are touted by consumers as "consumer friendly."

Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" Awards to deserving companies and organizations because they have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing a specific product or service that fosters consumer confidence and market acceptance."



To apply for the "Friend of the Consumer" award, complete the online application and return it to ACC with the application fee. Applicants will be notified within 5 days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of receipt of your award application.

For more information, visit: <http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp>

## Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Accepting Applications for 2015 Summer Cycle:

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification**. Applications for the 2015 Summer cycle are now being accepted through August 31, 2015.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

