

# Effective Passenger Briefings: Regs And Risks

**James Albright** June 03, 2021



Flight attendant Jeffrey Joly briefs his business jet passengers.

Credit: James Albright

*Editor's note: this is the first of a two-part article on passenger briefings.*

If you are in the business of moving people from Point A to Point B, you could/should/must be in the business of letting these people--let's call them passengers--know what to expect when things go well and not so well. A lot of the specifics depend on your operation, but in my view, they shouldn't. What follows is a checklist of sorts that you will only have to run once, but when you do, it might change the way you look at passenger briefings.

## **Understand the Regulatory Requirements**

For those of us flying under U.S. [FAA](#) rules, the basic requirement for passenger briefings is in FAR Part 91.519 and it begins: “Before each takeoff the pilot in command (PIC) of an airplane carrying passengers shall ensure that all passengers have been orally briefed on...” and then lists what has to be briefed.

Take notice of the phrases “shall ensure” and “have been orally briefed.” The former means the PIC can delegate this responsibility; but that does have restrictions if you fly commercially. (More on that later.) The latter statement doesn’t say when, other than the past tense. Can you have briefed the passengers a year ago? Sure, but you have to ensure that it has been done at some point. Part 121.571 also says this briefing must be made “before each takeoff.” Every Part 135 operator I’ve worked for also requires the briefing before each takeoff.

If you are flying internationally, you will see similar language in ICAO Annex 6 Part II, Paragraph 2.2.2.3.1, again with the “shall ensure” phrase but without the “orally briefed” stipulation.

How does this change for commercial operators? Part 135.117 restricts the delegation to the pilot in command, “a crewmember, or other qualified person designated by the certificate holder and approved by the administrator.” With most operations, a flight attendant is approved, a cabin attendant is not. You will have to check your approved operations manual to be sure.

The bare minimum list of things to brief can be found in those references and include:

- \*Smoking (when, where and under what conditions it is prohibited).
- \*Use of safety belts and harnesses.
- \*Location and means for opening the passenger entry door and emergency exits.
- \*Location of survival equipment.
- \*Ditching procedures and the use of flotation equipment for a flight over water.
- \*The normal and emergency use of oxygen equipment installed on the airplane.
- \*Location and operation of fire extinguishers (commercial operations).

While there are qualifiers for commercial operators and for rotorcraft operations, the list is fairly short. The use of personal electronic devices should also be covered, but the requirements go well beyond a reading of Part 91.21, which limited these PEDs to hearing aids, pacemakers and other items you might only see in a 1950s television program. If your operation hasn’t tackled the subject of PEDs and lithium-ion batteries, you need to do that as soon as possible. See Advisory Circular 91.21-1, Use of Portable Electronic Devices Aboard Aircraft. Also, take a look at “[Saying Yes to Portable Electronic Devices](#)” in the January 2015 issue of *BCA* for a primer.

## **Understand the Risks**



Gulfstream GII (N711TE), Feb. 16, 1999. Photo credit: [NTSB](#)

Before you adopt a “one and done” approach to passenger briefings, consider that information that has been received recently is going to be more easily recalled. And passengers who have been schooled on the use of emergency exits the day of the flight will be better prepared than those who haven’t thought about it since the day they boarded the aircraft for the first time.

You should also realize that every time you give the briefing, you will better cement the same information for when they need it most. Business aviation has too many examples where the passengers were seemingly better prepared than the crew.

On Feb. 16, 1999, a Gulfstream II departed the end of Runway 16R after landing at Van Nuys Airport (KVNY), California, and came to rest with the main entry door jammed. The pilots and cabin attendant evacuated the aircraft using the aft baggage compartment door, running right past their only passenger, leaving him alone and wondering what to do. He thankfully had the presence of mind to follow the crew to safety and into the arms of a firefighter.

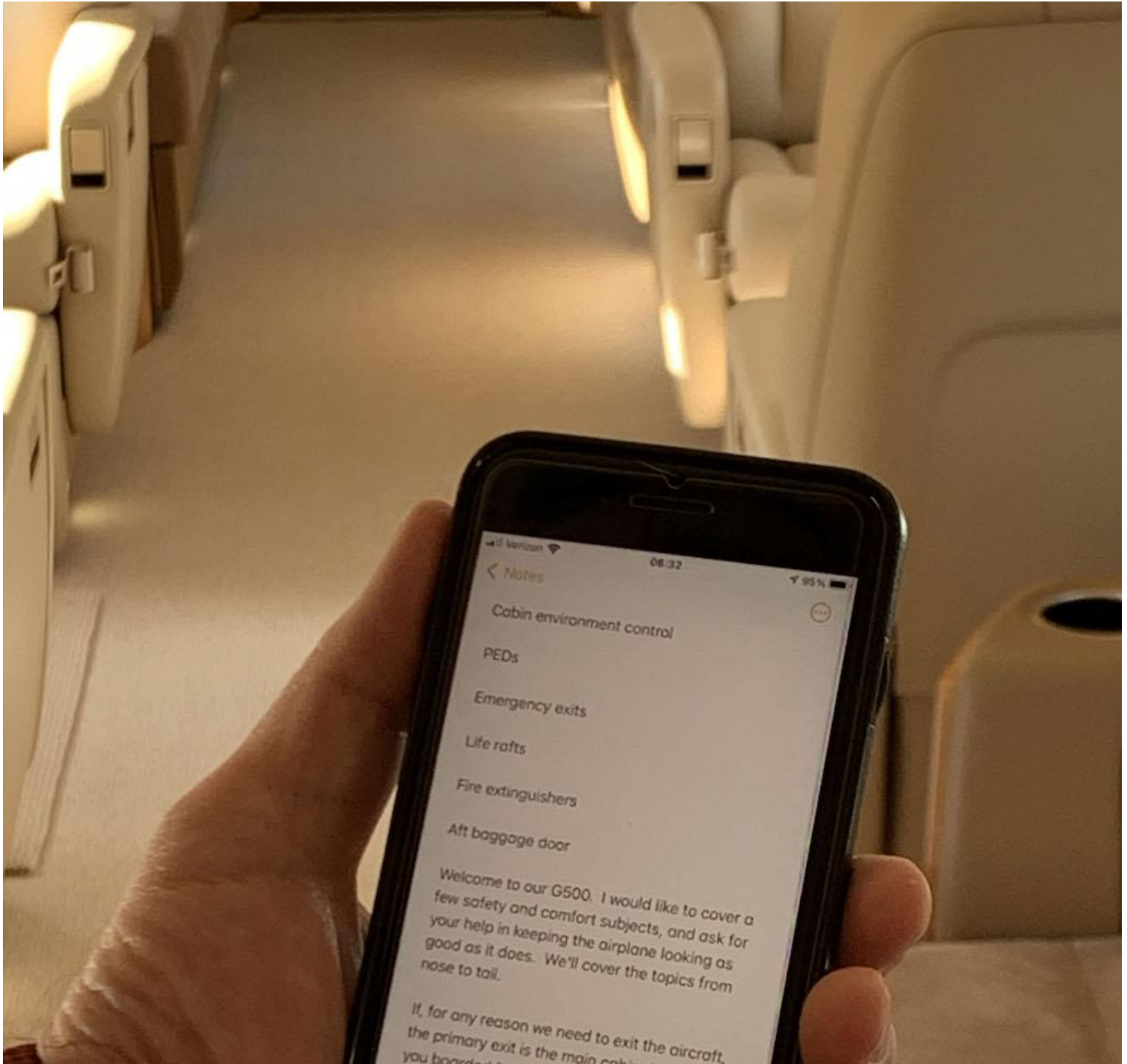
On Feb. 2, 2005, a [Bombardier](#) Challenger 600 departed the end of Runway 06 at Teterboro Airport (KTEB), New Jersey, after failing to take off, and crashed into a building. Both pilots were pinned in their seats and the cabin attendant was unable to open the main entrance door. Two passengers were able to rotate the handle and kick the door open.

As crewmembers, we can clearly benefit from a regular briefing to keep these kinds of emergency procedures fresh in our minds. You might think a briefing prior to every takeoff is unnecessary, especially if you fly only with the same passengers. In my flight department, we brief all of our passengers during their first flight with us every calendar year. We track who has been briefed to ensure no one escapes the briefing.

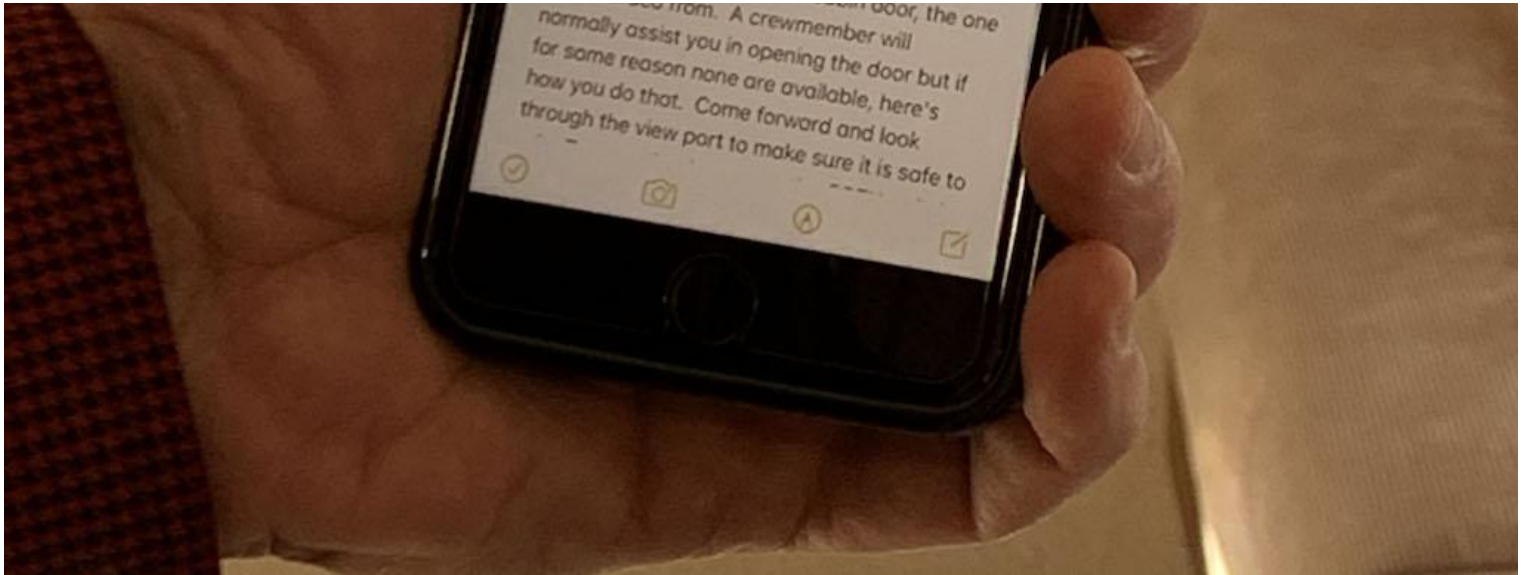
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# Effective Passenger Briefings: Make Them Memorable

James Albright June 04, 2021







A briefing ready to go in your iPhone. Photo credit: James Albright

*Editor's note: The first part of this article series [discussed the regulations and risks](#) of passenger briefings.*

Airline passengers can be so skilled at listening to a flight attendant's "canned" briefing that they have it memorized. Pity the poor flight attendant who has to give it several times a day! In the business aviation world, we might give the briefing so infrequently that we are unable to recite it without a cue card. (I have mine on my phone.)

You should design the briefing so that it holds your passengers' attention, keeps them interested in the important content, and keys you to cover the required points. My technique is to start at the front (main entrance door operation), go to the first seat (seat belts and life vests), point to the no smoking sign (no smoking and then to the emergency lighting), point to the location of the oxygen masks, point to the cabin control iPods (also talk about portable electronic devices), point to the emergency exits and the life rafts below the divans, point to the aft galley (and the position of the nearest fire extinguishers) and point to the aft baggage door (to remind them of the altitude limit for access above 45,000 ft.).

### **Practice**

Having grown up flying with flight attendants, my first opportunity to give a passenger briefing was as a "seasoned" pilot with 20 years of flying under my belt. Afterward, one of my passengers said, "I hope you know the cockpit better than the cabin." Ouch! Now, 20 years later, I volunteer for the duty just to keep it fresh in my mind. When we traded one aircraft for another, I insisted that each pilot practice on the rest of the flight department first. You know, and I know, that your ability to give a passenger briefing has very little to do with your skills as a pilot. But your passengers might not know that; so, you better practice.

### **Keep Records**

If you elect to give your passenger briefings less than once every takeoff or once every trip, I recommend you document who has been briefed. That will avoid the embarrassing moment of having to ask someone if they've been briefed only to hear them say, "Yeah, you gave me that briefing last week!" Or even worse, having them say yes only to avoid it altogether. It can also serve to reassure you that people putting their lives in your hands every flight will have every advantage that comes from a recent and thorough passenger briefing.