

United to give pilots access to stun guns

Airline to provide training; devices will be stored in lockboxes

By TERRI LANGFORD
Staff Writer

United Airlines wants to become the first major U.S. air carrier to allow pilots access to stun guns in planes' cockpits.

If the plan is approved by the federal government, United would begin installing advanced Taser guns in electronically coded lockboxes in the cockpits of its more than 500 planes.

The weapons fire an electronic charge that disables an attacker for five seconds or more. Pilots will be trained to use the devices.

"United and its pilots believe Tasers are an important addition to enhanced cockpit security. Tasers will incapacitate an attacker without endangering the airplane," said Andrew Studdert, chief operating officer and executive vice president of United, based in Elk Grove Village, Ill.

United pilot Herb Hunter, a spokesman for the Air Line Pilots Association, endorsed the stun-gun plan as "a good first step."

Soon after the Sept. 11 hijackings of four jetliners, the idea of voluntarily arming pilots with firearms received widespread attention and was being pushed by the Air Lines Pilots Association, the nation's largest pilots union.

But congressional support for such a measure was mixed in the weeks after, and President Bush said he did not support authorizing such a measure.

Federal Aviation Administration regulations prohibit weapons in an airplane, but the aviation security bill that is to be voted on Friday would allow pilots with proper training to carry firearms in the cockpit, said House Majority Leader Dick Army, R-Flower Mound.

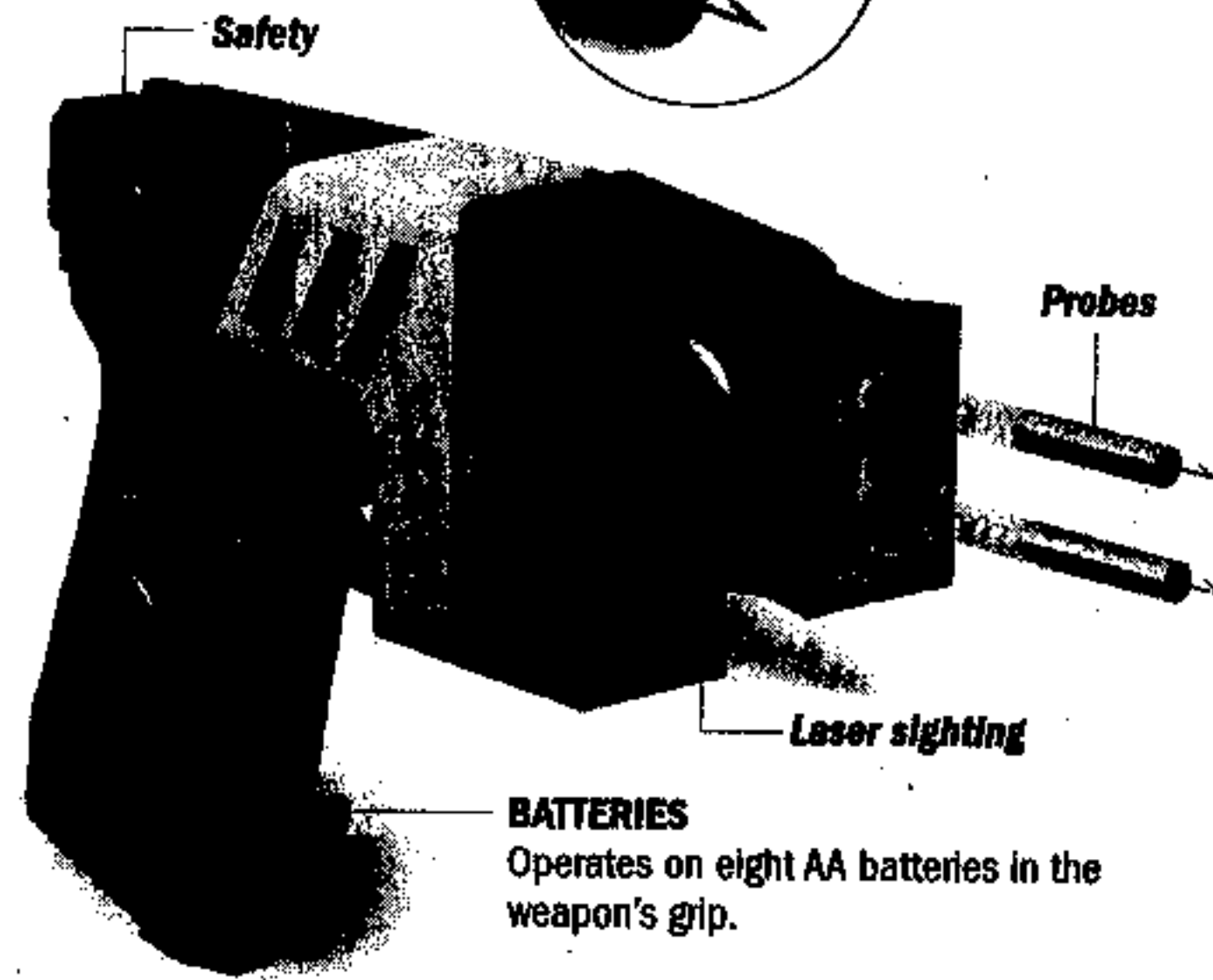
Having access to stun guns "was on our list when we testified

STUN GUNS IN THE COCKPIT

United Airlines said Thursday that it will provide advanced Taser stun guns for its pilots. The M26 fires two probes that disable an attacker with a 26-watt charge.

PROBES

Two barbed probes fire up to 21 feet to deliver the charge via thin, insulated wires. The charge can be delivered through 2 inches of clothing.



BATTERIES
Operates on eight AA batteries in the weapon's grip.

SOURCES: Taser International; Dallas Public Safety Supply; Dallas Morning News research

Staff Graphic

September 25th, and that's still on our list," ALPA spokesman John Mazer said Thursday. "That's not in lieu or a substitute ... we want both."

Airlines have been moving to shore up security since the terrorist attacks — sometimes on government orders, but often on their own.

Most have already strengthened cockpit doors, well before the Department of Transportation's Dec. 31 deadline.

United and others have done so with iron bars, while JetBlue Airways lined the fortified cockpit doors of its jets with Kevlar — the material inside bulletproof vests.

Mesa Air Group, which operates America West Express and US Airways Express, last month became the first U.S. airline company to say its pilots would use

stun guns. Several other carriers have held discussions with Taser International Inc. of Scottsdale, Ariz., the manufacturer of the stun guns.

"I believe stun guns rather than handguns offer additional security in our skies with less of a safety risk to innocent passengers and the structure of the plane, if the stun guns are operated properly by trained pilots and flight attendants," said Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-New York.

United also said Thursday it will start, pending government approval, a special training program for flight attendants, aimed at self-protection and assisting passengers. The company did not release more specific information, citing security concerns.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.