

United wants to give pilots stun guns

Airline faces FAA showdown to get plan approved

By Marilyn Adams
USA TODAY

United Airlines wants to equip all its cockpits with stun guns that pilots could use to repel attackers — if it gets government approval.

A compromise aviation security bill approved by Congress Thursday allows weapons in the cockpit. It needs President Bush's signature to become law.

United's plan to become the first major U.S. airline with armed pilots sets up a showdown with the Federal Aviation Administration, which opposes any guns on board. "(United's plan) isn't permitted under our regulations," FAA spokesman Paul Turk says. FAA chief Jane Garvey "has said she sees no reason to change the regulation."

House Transportation Committee Chairman Don Young, R-Alaska, said Thursday that the security bill agreed to by a House and Senate conference committee allows pilots "their choice of weapons. If I had my way, they'd all carry .22s."

- How stun gun works, 2B
- Airport security, 5A, 3B

U.S. airlines already have fortified cockpit doors against the type of forceful intrusion that terrorists must have used to hijack four flights Sept. 11. Longer-range plans call for new cockpit doors that will be impenetrable. But pilots want weapons, and flight attendants demanded training for dealing with attackers in the cabin.

United said Thursday that it will soon start training flight attendants to "protect themselves, enhance cabin security and assist customers." United spokesman Andy Plews said the program will be "much more than self-defense" but declined to provide details.

"Right now, we are alone with no training to defend the cabin and our customers," says Jeff Zack, a spokesman for the Association of Flight Attendants. "This program is about the security of the whole airplane," Plews says. "We think we'll get FAA approval."

United plans to buy Advanced Tasers by Taser International of Scottsdale, Ariz. It's the same stun gun used by more than 900 law enforcement and corrections agencies in the USA, Europe and Canada, says Taser President Tom Smith. American Trans Air, British Airways and Mesa also have expressed interest, he says.

FAA officials worry that pilots would have to leave the cockpit to use the weapons unless an assailant broke through the cockpit door. They also worry that stun guns could be turned against the crew. United says the guns would be kept in lockboxes in cockpits.

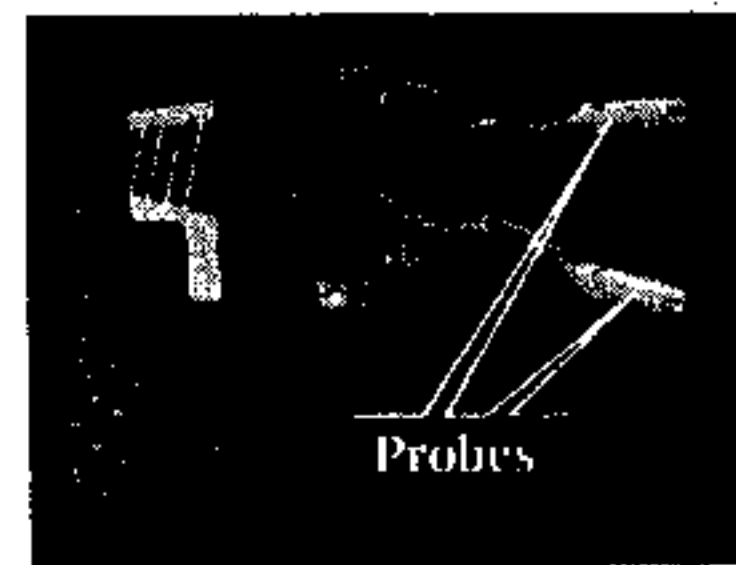
"This is a good first step," says Herb Hunter of United's pilots union. "We need some kind of defensive system for the cockpit, and a stun gun does qualify."

United wants stun guns for pilots

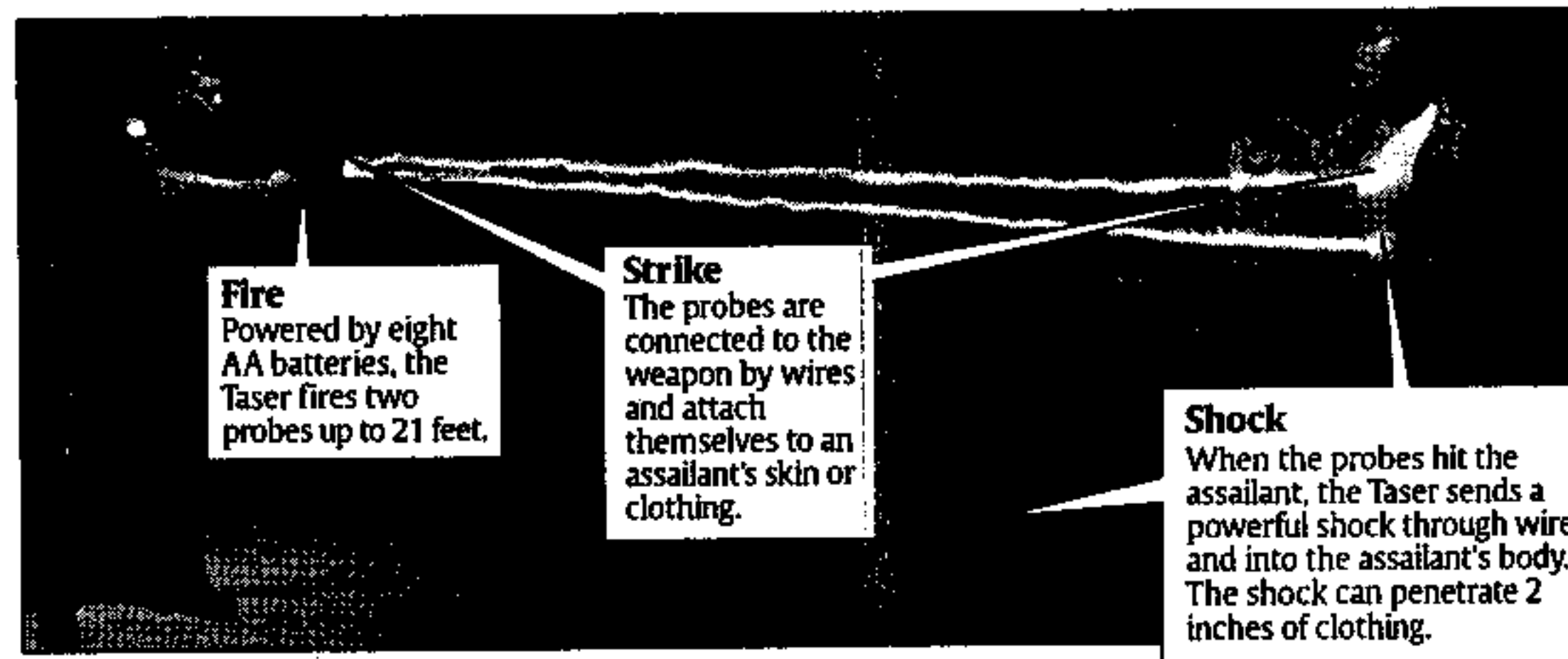
United Airlines wants to put Advanced Tasers in the cockpits of its planes as an added security measure if it gets government approval. The Tasers would be kept in electronically coded lockboxes. (Story, 1B)

How the Advanced Taser works

The stun gun shocks an assailant's nervous system, knocking him to the ground and incapacitating him.



Probes



Source: Taser International

By Robert W. Ahrens, USA TODAY