

CHAOS™ Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a CHAOS Strike?

CHAOS (Create Havoc Around our System) is a strike action that can take many forms. It could be a mass walkout for half an hour, a day, or a week at a time, with no advance notice to the company or to the passengers. It may be a strike at a certain domicile or over a certain piece of equipment. We could strike the entire system for 15 minutes, or strike all of the odd numbered gates in a particular city for a day. Or, as AFACWA did with success at Alaska Airlines, we may ask Flight Attendants to walk off individual flights at random with no warning to management. CHAOS (unannounced actions) may also be used in non-strike situations.



CHAOS is a strategically planned and targeted set of actions designed to use our strengths to put pressure on management.

2. What is the Railway Labor Act?

The Railway Labor Act (RLA) is the federal law that governs labor relations in the airline industry. The RLA is different than the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which governs all other private industry in the United States. The RLA was written to deal with the unique nature of the transportation industry. When it comes to labor disputes during Section 6 contract negotiations, the RLA mandates a lengthy process. After mediation and release by the National Mediation Board, a 30day “cooling off” period is required prior to a strike. It is not until the 30day period is over, that the parties involved are permitted to engage in “self help.”

Striking is a form of self help, and the RLA gives strikers options, such as intermittent strikes (CHAOS) and secondary picketing, that aren’t available to workers in other industries. The Supreme Court has clearly established the unique authority that the RLA grants strikers.

3. Why CHAOS and not a traditional strike?

CHAOS maximizes our impact on management, and minimizes the risk to Flight Attendants. Unlike a traditional strike, management will not be able to predict when and where we will strike. Management will not know if we will conduct an all out strike, strike certain flights, strike certain cities, or conduct a mass strike for 15 minutes. CHAOS also allows Flight Attendants to continue to work and receive a paycheck right up until the strategic strike and then return to work again. CHAOS protects against the use of replacement Flight Attendants. For example, roving one-day strikes at one domicile at a time would foul up the whole system, but going back after a day would guard against the deployment of replacements. By selectively striking only on layovers, at certain cities or on certain days when staffing is minimum and there is a lack of available Flight Attendants, even a single striking crewmember could shut down a flight. Targeted strikes against specific types of aircraft or specific routes on a given day make it difficult for the company to plan its schedule and react to CHAOS action.

4. Will I be fired if I participate in CHAOS targeted strike or other strike action? If so, how long will I be out?

No. You cannot be fired for engaging in a legal strike authorized by the Union. Under the laws, however, strikers can be subject to replacement, “temporary” or “permanent” If management uses other current employees (e.g., managers trained as Flight Attendants) as replacements, they would be considered “temporary replacements” and would have to leave the Flight Attendants position at the end of the strike.

CHAOS is designed to make it difficult for management to deploy replacement workers by using the element of surprise. But no strike is risk free. During the CHAOS campaign at Alaska airlines, the company had a variety of approaches when responding to our strikes. Some Flight Attendants were held out of service with pay and allowed to return to work two weeks later. Others were told they were permanently replaced but were brought back from the recall list a few weeks later before we could litigate the legitimacy of this use of replacements. Finally, Alaska management suspended a group of CHAOS strikers and told them they would be held out of service without pay until CHAOS ended. The court ruled that these latter suspension were illegal and ordered Alaska to reinstate those Flight Attendants with back pay.

Management may try similar responses or they may try something different. Whatever they do, AFACWA’s Legal Department will aggressively defend the rights of our strikers.

5. Will the company accept me back without discipline following a CHAOS strike?

If they want to comply with the law, they will. Once again, you cannot be disciplined for engaging in a legal strike authorized by the Union.

6. If I get fired, will there be a disciplinary investigation?

Again, it would be illegal for management to fire you for participating in a legal strike sanctioned by the Union. If management nevertheless fires or disciplines strikers, it difficult to say if they would follow the usual rules and procedures since the scenario assumes they are acting illegally to begin with. In addition to challenging the legality of such discipline or termination in court, AFACWA’s attorneys will take every available legal step to insist that management follows the existing work rules and procedures.

7. Is my seniority maintained during a strike?

Yes. Reinstatement once a strike is over would be to the same seniority position that the striker occupied prior to the strike.

8. How will I get home if my flight is chosen for CHAOS? Will I be put up in a hotel until return trip arrangements are made?

If the company refuses to allow CHAOS strikers to return to work immediately following the conclusion of a targeted flight, we will all need to work together to address the resulting situation. If a striking Flight Attendant is stranded downline, we will work through our AFACWA colleagues at other carriers to accommodate Flight Attendants needs accordingly. For example, we can call on AFACWA members at other airlines to help out with buddy passes and places to stay. We can be very resourceful if we all work together. The important (short) answer to these questions is that you are not going to be left to wander

around without support. Get in touch with your AFACWA representatives before you incur any personal expenses.

9. If we strike at a layover station, where will the Flight Attendants stay? And once again, is this an out of pocket expense or will it be billed directly to the union?

If a striker is stranded in an out station, we will work with that person to make certain she or he has a place to stay.

10. I will strike, but I don't want to be on the G.U.T.S. list. I don't want to be targeted. Why should I sign the G.U.T.S. list when other people are willing to strike?

Everyone is encouraged to sign up for the G.U.T.S. (Gear Up To Strike) list because that will give us more flexibility in implementing CHAOS strikes for maximum effect. If too few sign up, our options will be more limited and less effective. Nobody wants to strike, but we all need to support CHAOS to the greatest extent in order to give ourselves the greatest chance at success.

Let's clear up the confusion. The G.U.T.S. list is made up of Flight Attendants who have committed to be the first called upon if and when it's time to strike – our front line troops in the CHAOS strategy. We need these volunteers so that we can effectively target strikes and ensure maximum impact on the company. These volunteers will be the leaders of this effort, either striking the first targeted flights or acting as leaders when more and more flights are struck. But CHAOS is still a strike, so, if we strike a flight, every Flight Attendant on that flight is expected to honor the strike just as if it were a traditional picket line. Until the company agrees to a contract we can accept, CHAOS will continue to spread. We have said we might strike the whole system for half an hour, or a day or a week. So, everyone needs to be ready to strike when called upon. We will use the G.U.T.S. list for strategic and tactical targeting of flights, but no one is exempt once the strikes begin.

11. What if I don't want to strike?

We are trying to create leverage to get a new agreement that is collectively better than the ones we have today. Everyone will benefit from this effort, so everyone should participate. In fact, the more people who say they don't want to strike, the more likely it becomes that management will prevail in these negotiations.

12. What should we say to passengers who have questions about CHAOS?

When you are working, don't discuss CHAOS with anyone onboard the aircraft, including passengers. If anyone asks you about any news articles they may have read politely tell them that you are unable to discuss that with them.