

Southwest Checks Planes After Hole Forces Landing

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Southwest Airlines ordered inspections of nearly 200 aircraft after a football-sized hole opened up in the passenger cabin of a plane during flight, forcing an emergency landing in West Virginia.

Travelers on the 737 aircraft could see outside through the 1-foot-by-1-foot hole that appeared during the flight Monday. The cabin lost pressure, but no one was injured on the Nashville to Baltimore flight with 126 passengers and five crew members on board.

Passenger Brian Cunningham told NBC's "Today" show Tuesday that he had dozed off in his seat in midcabin when he was awakened by "the loudest roar I'd ever heard."

He said the hole was above his seat. People stayed calm and put on the oxygen masks that dropped from the ceiling.

"After we landed in Charleston, the pilot came out and looked up through the hole, and everybody applauded, shook his hand, a couple of people gave him hugs," Cunningham said.

It's not clear what caused the damage.

"I'd say it's not routine," Southwest Airlines Co. spokeswoman Marilee McInnis said in describing what happened.

McInnis said the company was inspecting all of its 737-300s as a precaution. She said service Tuesday shouldn't be affected. The 137-seater makes up about a third of the carrier's fleet of 544 jets.

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