October 16, 2014

To the Membership,

As the Ebola situation continues to grow within the United States and more specifically the recent announcement that infected individuals have traveled through DFW, I am issuing the following statement in an effort to protect each and every Local 591 member and to ensure compliance with critical elements of our collective bargaining agreement.

Article 27(e) provides in no uncertain terms: “No employee will be required to work under unsafe or unsanitary conditions.”

Article 27(i) provides, in pertinent part, that the Company “will furnish all required safety devices for employees working on hazardous or unsanitary work; and employees will be required to use or wear the devices in performing that work. The Company will promptly notify the employees and the Union of the use of any material, equipment, or procedure known to be hazardous to employees exposed and the known procedures to control the hazards …”

Notwithstanding the clarity of these contractual provisions, to date, it is the position of Local 591 that the Company has yet to identify and address member safety concerns regarding blood or bodily fluids in the workplace.

Since there has not been effective written protocol(s), insufficient or little training, nor specific written guidelines for Local 591’s ground employees to follow or a twenty-four hour point-of-contact made available, Local 591 has determined it is critical we take a proactive position.

Due to the Company’s inability to address Local 591’s concerns and comply with Article 27, it is Local 591’s position that members of Local 591 do not have a contractual obligation to handle any material that contains bodily contaminants including blood or bodily fluids such as urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, or semen. It is important to note that bodily fluids may contain blood even if blood is not visible.

Furthermore, it has been determined that the Ebola virus can survive on surfaces for several days and that people can be infected by direct contact with objects (like pillows, packages, countertops and toilet seats) that contain infectious blood or body fluids.

Local 591 has been monitoring this situation closely and has been attempting to get proper equipment, resource materials, contact lists and written protocols in place for Local 591’s
members. Unfortunately American Airlines has not provided Local 591 with enough information that we believe is satisfactory in ensuring our members safety; nor has the airline provided what Local 591 believes is the necessary PPE, required OSHA training, or necessary handling updates from the CDC with respect to the procedure for confirming that an identified area of concern has been properly treated and decontaminated.

In order to promote health, control the spread of contagious disease, and ensure compliance with our collective bargaining agreement, as a minimum employers are required to protect workers against exposure to Ebola, and provide the following areas of required training: “The OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard (29 CFR 1910.1030), The OSHA Personal Protective Equipment/General Requirements Standard (29 CFR 1910.132) and The OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (29 CFR 1910.134).”

Below is the protocol that Local 591 requests each member follow, whenever they have a concern that they may come into contact with any type of blood or bodily fluids. First and foremost, Local 591 expects that the flight crew will make an entry into the logbook whenever there is a blood or bodily fluid contamination release takes place on the aircraft. American Airlines will verify that the passenger in question has not traveled within 21 days to Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone or been in contact with a person who is known to have been in Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone for possible Ebola contamination. If you encounter an area of blood or bodily fluid that is not in the logbook, make the appropriate maintenance entry in the logbook. Examples are, “Fwd Lavatory or Seats 14A, 14B, 14C, or oxygen unit and mask from overhead bin 18 ABC,” must be verified that passenger who released the blood or bodily fluid has not traveled within 21 days to Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone or been in contact with a person who is known to have been in Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone for possible Ebola contamination before aircraft maintenance can accomplish work in the area. Local 591 will continue to monitor changes to the number of days or locations of concern listed on the CDC website and send out texts when we become aware of any changes.

Once an Environmental Coordinator or member of management confirms the contaminated area is free of risk from Ebola or any other infectious disease and the area is cleaned of blood or bodily fluids, a member of management with an A&P will sign the balancing entry of accomplishment in the logbook. If management or an environmental coordinator cannot confirm the area is “safe from risk,” then an AMT is not to enter the contaminated area in question. Local 591’s expectation is that none of our members will ever be placed in a situation where you are untrained, do not have the required PPE, or face a risk of contracting Ebola.

With respect to our Facilities Maintenance members and Stores members, Local 591 also believes you may not have had the proper training and expects that American Airlines will not expose you to the potential for the Ebola virus. Specifically for Facilities Maintenance, close off any restroom or area where you find blood or bodily fluids, for the potential exposure to Ebola and request written authorization for “clearance to enter,” from an Environmental Coordinator before doing so. Obviously there are other situations a member may encounter where we would expect you to call for the Environmental Coordinator to
verify clearance for entry or handling. Our expectation is that a member of Local 591 will never be placed in a situation where you are untrained or do not have the required PPE. As previously stated, Local 591’s expectation is that none of our members will ever be placed in a situation where you are untrained, do not have the required PPE, or face a risk of contracting Ebola.

Until the Ebola situation in the United States is contained and controlled, Local 591 believes that whenever management cannot validate an area is “risk free” from exposure to Ebola, Local 591 deems these areas unsafe for our members to work, and we believe a member has the right to refuse to perform the work under Article 27. In doing so, Local 591 will be waiving the right to file a grievance in the event the work is performed by management representatives, who will also sign for the accomplishment. This agreement by Local 591 is only for areas that cannot be confirmed clear of the possibility of Ebola and any other work performed by non-Local 591 members in violation of the CBA will not be tolerated.

In closing, it is further the position of Local 591 that at no time have we negotiated into the Agreement any provision that will require our members to be tasked with cleaning up any blood or bodily fluids.

Gary Peterson
President, Local 591