Flight attendant Patty Young initiated efforts for smokefree flights in the 1960s and intensified lobbying efforts in the 1980s. Ms. Young is currently a board member of FAMRI (Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute).

Aviation and tobacco industries were often depicted together in advertisements. Flight attendants were used as models in cigarette promotions. Smoking was permitted on virtually all flights. Some airlines even distributed complimentary cigarettes.

Also in 1986, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) publishes “The Airliner Cabin Environment: Air Quality and Safety.”

In 1988, the Tobacco Institute’s “Smokers’ Rights Alliance” launched a letter writing campaign to Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration, in an effort to block the adoption of smokefree flight policies. The campaign failed.

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In the publication, NAS reports that the nation’s flight attendants are exposed to smoke levels similar to those of a person living with someone who smokes a pack a day, and recommends a “ban on smoking on all domestic commercial flights.”

Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights (ANR) initiates a grassroots campaign to eliminate smoking on airlines with the publication of a front-page story in the Fall issue of ANR UPDATE. The article states: “ANR feels it is essential that the federal government quickly implement the [NAS’s] proposed ban.”
1988 January 1st – California’s law making all in-state commercial travel smokefree takes effect.

1989 The American Association for Respiratory Care releases a national survey showing that 92.8% of nonsmoking, and 58.1% of smoking airline travelers polled approve of the smokefree law on flights of two hours or less.

1990 On February 25th, the federal law, signed by President George H.W. Bush, making all domestic airline flights of six hours or less smokefree takes effect.

1992 The International Civil Aviation Organization passes a resolution urging its 152 member countries to go completely smokefree by July 1, 1996.


2000 On June 4th, the Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act, signed by President Bill Clinton, becomes effective, making all flights between the U.S. and foreign destinations 100% smokefree. In a press release issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation, Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater says: “Protecting the health of Americans includes ensuring their right to breathe smoke-free air.”

2011 The US Department of Transportation (DOT) proposes a rule to prohibit e-cigarette use on U.S. airplanes. While federal regulations still allow these products to be used during flight, many major airlines have decided to include them in their list of prohibited items.

2015 Airline employees and passengers commemorate 25 years of smokefree domestic flights. Unfortunately, the DOT still has not finalized a rule on e-cigarettes despite the health hazards.

Most U.S. airports are 100% smokefree indoors... But smoking is still allowed in numerous major airports including Atlanta, Salt Lake City, Dulles, Las Vegas, Dallas, Memphis, Nashville and more.

*Source: Collection of The University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, 2003.
**Source: Tobacco Control, Volume 13 (Supplement 1), March 2004.