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## Faulty rules blamed for gun's firing

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By Audrey Hudson - Inadequate handgun rules designed by Department of Homeland Security officials are to blame for last weekend's accidental discharge of a pistol by a commercial pilot during landing preparations, a pilots association said yesterday.

"The pilot has to take his gun off and lock it up before he leaves the cockpit, so he was trying to secure the gun in preparation for landing, while he was trying to fly the airplane, too," said David Mackett, president of the Airline Pilots Security Alliance. "In the process of doing that, the padlock that is required to be inserted into the holster pulled the trigger and caused the gun to discharge."

The unnamed US Airways pilot, who was landing at Charlotte/Douglas (N.C.) International Airport, has been placed on leave by the airline since the incident.

This was the first report of a pilot's gun being discharged on a plane.

APSA, an organization of pilots who lobby Congress on aviation security issues, said the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has refused to adopt standard carriage rules recommended last year by the Federal Air Marshal Service.

"We complained to DHS two years ago that this was an unsafe rule," Mr. Mackett said.

Rather than carry the weapon on their person at all times, pilots must lock it up before opening the cockpit door, meaning pilots handle the gun as many as 10 times per flight, the association estimates.

Pilots who have completed training to become federal flight deck officers (FFDOs) and carry weapons must use a holster used primarily as a home child-safety lock. A padlock is inserted through the holster and trigger guard, but, if inserted backward, it can trigger the gun, pilots say.

"It's a completely unsafe system unless it's used in a static environment — in a bedroom with good light. But to try to balance a gun on your lap and padlock it while flying an airplane 300 miles an hour, sometimes in the dark, is not secure," Mr. Mackett said.

Gregory S. Alter, Federal Air Marshal Service spokesman, said federal law prohibits carriage outside of the flight deck.

"The methods used by FFDOs to secure, transport and store their duty weapon are fully

consistent with long-standing law-enforcement practices widely in use with many law-enforcement organizations," Mr. Alter said. "Once the weapon-discharge investigation is complete, any lessons learned will be implemented."

The Associated Press obtained photos of the damage to the exterior of the plane that showed a small exit hole below the cockpit window.

None of the 124 passengers aboard Flight 1536 from Denver on Saturday were injured. Airline officials said the Airbus A319 was removed from service after the incident and returned to flight status Wednesday.

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