

# Unfriendly gates could make skies friendlier

**Lee Rozen/Moscow-Pullman Daily News**

The rule of 45, the airlines called it.

When flying, you needed to add up all the dimensions of your carry-on suitcase - length, width and thickness - and if they came to more than 45 inches, you needed to check the bag.

Except the rule was seldom enforced.

Then in 2008, when airlines started charging for checked luggage, carry-on luggage really started to swell.

The first passengers who push their way aboard airliners today get to stuff their fat bags into overhead bins, eating up space rightfully due meeker travelers who follow the rules and stay in line.

Now, United Airlines says it is going to crack down on those trying to get overloaded suitcases into the passenger cabin of its jets.

There will be several results.

Ticketing lines and boarding areas will get more contentious and slower. Neither airline employees nor any of their passengers will enjoy that.

Passengers with oversize bags must check them - for free at the gate, or for a \$25 fee if caught before the security check, as United intends to do. Those passengers certainly won't enjoy that, but airline chief financial officers will. United just happens to be looking for some way to generate \$175 million more each year from baggage fees. Purely coincidental, its spokesman says.

There will be more room for the luggage of rule-following passengers in the overhead bins and that should speed the loading process. Most passengers and probably every flight attendant will cheer that outcome. A five-hour flight with a suitcase tucked under the seat in front of you where your size 12 feet should go - because the overhead bins are full - is not comfortable.

Even if you do some homework online and plan ahead, today's basic airline ticket on a domestic U.S. flight is somewhat more expensive than it was 20 years ago, mainly because of the rapidly rising costs for jet fuel.

But the experience is a lot more unpleasant.

Planes are fuller - the chance of finding an empty seat next to you is near zero, where it used to be an even bet.

There's an added fee for every little thing - footroom, luggage, food and drink, maybe even blankets and pillows.

United's decision may be one step toward making the experience a little less disagreeable.