

Siouxlanders on board as American Eagle jet makes emergency landing in Mason City

Molly Montag Mason City Globe-Gazette 13 hrs ago (1)



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An American Eagle jetliner sits on the runway at Mason City Municipal after an emergency landing in the cockpit.

MASON CITY, Iowa | Jake Shields sensed trouble for American Eagle Flight 3495 when he felt the jet make a series of abrupt turns on the way to Chicago on Tuesday.

“I knew something was wrong when we started making extreme turns,” said Shields, of Spencer, Iowa. “Weird dipping and turning.”

“Bobbing and weaving,” added fellow passenger Shelly Norman, of Milford, Iowa. “It was just a little more than turbulence.”

Officials say that’s because the plane was about to make an emergency landing at Mason City Municipal Airport due to smoke in the cockpit.

Operated by Envoy Air, the jet carrying 45 passengers and three crew members was headed from Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls to O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

The plane touched down around 1 p.m. in Mason City without incident. It stopped on the runway facing east.

"I thought for two seconds it was going to be in a field, but (the pilot) emergency-stopped it on a dime," said passenger Andrew Orr, also of Spencer.

Passengers were directed out the emergency side exits of the aircraft as soon as it lurched to a halt.

They walked onto the wing, hopped down onto the pavement and then ran to a grassy area a few hundred yards from the plane.

Several local fire departments, including an airport crew, were sent to meet the plane. Multiple police agencies assisted at the scene.

Firefighters did not find any signs of fire or smoke on the plane.

Local officials had an approximately five-minute warning that the plane was experiencing trouble and was coming in for an unplanned landing, said Airport Operations Supervisor Dave Sims.

A Mason City Community Schools bus was brought in to get passengers off the hot runway and into the air-conditioned terminal. Though breezy, the air was humid with a temperature in the mid-80s and a heat index already in the 90s by early afternoon.

American Airlines spokeswoman Nancy Kalin said the company was sending a replacement plane to ferry the stranded passengers to Chicago on Tuesday night. They were expected to arrive around 8 p.m.

American Eagle is a regional carrier for American Airlines, the airline that also services Sioux Gateway Airport in Sioux City.

Flight 3495 passenger Melissa Rosales said she wasn't eager to get back on the plane after the sudden landing.

She, Shields and Norman – all co-workers at Polaris in Spirit Lake, Iowa, -- planned to continue on

their way toward Huntsville, Alabama. They were fresh off a weekend at home after spending the last month training workers at the new Polaris plant in Huntsville.

The facility makes the company's Slingshot three-wheeled vehicle.

"I have reservations, but if I can find a nice cold alcoholic beverage I will probably get back on the plane," said Rosales, of Spencer. "I'm not gonna lie."