

Sedation & use of tranquilizers on pets

It has been a long standing practice of IATA and its constituent carriers to discourage the use of sedatives and tranquilizers in animals to be transported either as cargo or as cabin baggage due to the potential for adverse effects during transport. This view is endorsed by veterinary organizations such as the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#).

In general, these drugs are administered prior to or during air transport to minimize the potential for undesirable behavior. Most commonly, drugs such as acepromizine which is in the phenothiazine class of drugs or benzodiazepam have been commonly prescribed. Of the two, acepromizine has the longest history of use given its rapid action and neuroleptic mode of action. It depresses motor activity as well as the sympathetic nervous system. Animals administered this drug often lose their righting ability and their sense of balance as a function of dose. Depending upon the dosage, they can lose the ability to position themselves and are susceptible to injury as well as obstruction of the airway due to abnormal postures. While this drug has a number of legitimate clinical usages and can be helpful in minimizing aggressive behavior as well as facilitating the induction of anesthesia with other agents, its use without frequent or continual observation of the animal can lead to situations where the animal's life can be threatened.

Other neuropharmacologic agents such as amitriptyline (an antidepressant) and clordiazepoxide (an anti-anxiety agent) singly or in combination have also been used to alter behavior in dogs and other animals. Like other drugs, they have some side effects that can be problematic when used in higher dosages including cardiac dysrhythmia, hypotension, CNS depression, and rarely convulsions. These agents, as well as tricyclic antidepressants such as clomipramine (aka Anafranil) which has a veterinary counterpart—Clomicalm, have been approved by the FDA for treating separation anxiety.

These drugs that are used to treat inappropriate behavior in pets must be administered for a period of weeks before changes will likely be noted in pet behavior. Animals that have been placed on these drugs to address behavioral problems at home may continue to have the benefit of the medication even though it has not been given during transit.

It is not established, and probably is unlikely, that tricyclic antidepressants or other available psychotherapeutic agents will reliably alleviate the risk of panic attacks and destructive behavior while in transit. While heavy sedation with all of its associated risks might be able to accomplish this, deciding upon the appropriate dosage to maintain the desired effect over a long and perhaps variable transit time in a varying transit environment and with little chance of re-dosing or adequate observation would either put the animal at risk or may not adequately address the potential for undesirable behavior.

IATA therefore continues to endorse recommendations **not to sedate or tranquilize pets or other animals in transit** specifically for the purposes of potentially preventing panic attacks or destructive behavior during that period of carriage. If sedation or tranquilization is to be done specifically for the journey for valid medical reasons, it needs to be done under the direction of a veterinarian and the administration of drugs - including time and dosage level- be noted on the health certificate. If such medications are to be used, this should be done only in those shipments accompanied by trained individuals appropriately certified/licensed to administer these drugs and when the ability to take emergency actions in the event of adverse events, exists or is possible.