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> Tarmac strandings

disruptive to people than to be stuck sitting on a plane five, six, seven hours with no explanation," he said at a briefing.

This year through Oct. 31, there were 864 flights with taxi out times of three hours or more, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Transportation officials, using 2007 and 2008 data, said there are an average of 1,500 domestic flights a year carrying about 114,000 passengers that are delayed more than three hours.

Last month, the department fined Continental Airlines, ExpressJet Airlines and Mesa Airlines \$175,000 for their roles in a nearly six-hour tar-

WHAT AIRLINES MUST DO

The Transportation Department says airlines whose planes are stranded on runways must:

- Provide food and water for passengers within two hours, and to maintain operable lavatories.
- Return to gate within three hours or face fine of \$27,500 per passenger.
- Assign staff to monitor flight delays and work on solutions.
- Post flight delay information on their Web sites

mac delay in Rochester, Minn. In August, Continental Express Flight 2816 en route to the Twin Cities was diverted to Rochester due to thunderstorms. Forty-seven passengers were kept overnight in a cramped plane because Mesaba employees refused to open a gate so that they could enter the closed airport terminal.

Under the new regulations,

the only exceptions to the requirement that planes must return to the gate after three hours are for safety or security or if air traffic control advises the pilot in command that returning to the terminal would disrupt airport operations.

Airlines could be fined \$27,500 per passenger for each violation of the three-hour limit.

The regulations apply to domestic flights. U.S. carriers operating international flights departing from or arriving in the United States must specify, in advance, their own time limits for deplaning passengers. Foreign carriers are not covered by the rules.

Tarmac strandings have mostly involved domestic flights, but the department is studying extending the three-hour limit to international flights, LaHood said.

Airlines will be required to provide food and water for passengers within two hours of a plane being delayed on a tarmac, and to maintain operable lavatories. They must also provide passengers with medical attention when necessary.

Airlines must designate an employee to monitor the effects of flight delays and cancellations and respond to consumer complaints. And they

would have to post flight delay information on their Web sites. Carriers who fail to comply could face government enforcement action for using unfair or deceptive trade practices.

The new regulations go even further than those proposed in Congress, giving passenger rights advocates many of the reforms they've sought for years.

"No more will they be able to strand passengers for over three hours in hot, sweaty, metal tubes," said Kate Hammi, founder of Flyersrights.org.

Past efforts to address the problem have fizzled in the face of industry opposition and promises to reform.

At Minneapolis-St. Paul International, the three-hour limit would most likely come into play when weather — either snow or thunderstorms — delays flights.

"We have plenty of places to

park the planes," said Patrick Hogan, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Airports Commission, which operates the airport. "The question is whether there will be gates available to get people off the plane."

If necessary, there's always the option of wheeling stairs up to a plane and busing passengers to the terminal, he said. Among the airlines here, Delta and its Northwest subsidiary would have the greatest ability to accommodate aircraft, because it controls the most gates at Minneapolis-St. Paul, one of its hubs.

Sun Country Airlines last summer implemented its own four-hour limit on tarmac delays and has yet to have a flight that exceeded that limit.

Staff writer John Welbes contributed to this story

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> Teaching touch

Touch has taken classrooms by storm.

For kids there, math and spelling activities that used to seem, well, booooring have a sudden allure on an iPod. This was clear on a recent morning in a room filled with students raptly tapping, scrolling and swiping.

Rivera's teacher, Jean Stai, had to impose little discipline as her kids lost themselves in Word Salad, a vocabulary program, TanZen, a geometry app, and States and Capitols, among others.

Her biggest challenge appeared to be prying the kids from one app so they'd switch to another. The students were handed sheets with short, personalized lists of apps each had to try.

"They're so engaged," Stai said. "Suddenly, it's not so horrifying to study your facts tables. It is like a game. What would be tedious with paper and pencil is no longer so with bright colors and things moving around."

Somerset recently obtained an iPod Touch minilab of sorts — consisting of a storage-and-charging cart on wheels with dozens of the players, along with a laptop for downloading educational apps and transferring them to the players. Teachers take turns checking out the cart one or more times a week and handing out the charged-up iPods to students for some high-tech learning that, to the kids, feels a lot like playtime.

Stai is not yet convinced iPods will have substantive, lasting educational value. But she doesn't discount the students' excitement in the two months or so she has been using iPods in class. "Enthusiasm is important," she said.

Laptops are in little danger of being displaced by iPods as the favored digital devices for hands-on learning in K-12 classrooms. Educational experts, though, are increasingly embracing the Apple handheld gadgets as teaching supplements and, in some cases, outright replacements for computers.

Ginger Malin, who trains the next generation of schoolteachers as a DePaul University secondary-instruction professor, recently began equip-



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Second-grader Seth Gordon uses an iPod Touch to work a tangram puzzle in teacher Mary Nelson's class at Somerset Elementary School. Jean Stai, another Somerset teacher, is struck by how engaged her fourth-graders are with the handheld gadgets. "Suddenly, it's not so horrifying to study your facts tables," she said. "It is like a game. What would be tedious with paper and pencil is no longer so with bright colors and things moving around."

ONLINE

For videos of Somerset Heights Elementary School students using and talking about their classroom iPods, go to yourtechweblog.com.

ping her students with iPod Touch players and inexpensive Flip digital-video cameras. These are being used to develop interactive lessons that the teachers-in-training may someday integrate into their own classrooms.

Malin, a gadget geek who likes going to tech conventions such as the Consumer Electronics Show, has discovered that her students in some cases are terrified of the classroom technology.

"They're petrified," she said. "I help them be less afraid of something new. I fail in front of them so they're not afraid to fail, too. The 'aha!' moments (eventually) come. I get e-mails from students who are so proud of what they've produced."

Developers of iPod Touch apps and add-on hardware are getting wise to a burgeoning educational market, too, and seizing the chance to innovate.

Alex Silverman, a former high school teacher now working as an app developer, has pioneered an eClicker system. It allows teachers and their students to communicate via iPod Touch over a classroom's Wi-Fi network. Such electronic interaction spurs classroom participation, he said, but older technologies to enable this are too expensive.

With eClicker, sold by Big Nerd Ranch Software, a classroom's only expense other than iPods is a \$25 eClicker app for the teacher (the eClicker app on students' iPods is free). This allows teachers to ask questions and get answers more easily than if prodding shy kids into speaking up, Silverman said.

The iPod Touch has been a godsend for Jon Smith, a fifth- and sixth-grade special-education teacher at Gibbs Elementary School in Canton, Ohio.

His students have a variety of learning disabilities that often cannot be overcome with regular teaching methods. But something as simple as flashcard slide shows on touchscreen iPods, with finger swipes for moving from one digital photo to the next, tends to electrify the kids. So Smith

has nudged his superiors into spending more money on the Apple devices.

His kids now rack up impressive scores with vocabulary-drill apps, devour social-studies moving-picture books, and even watch videos of themselves delivering book reports. This footage, after being taken with low-cost video cameras, is transferred to a computer and then synced to the kids' iPods.

Smith delights in seeing "a sparkle in the kids' eyes."

Charles Duarte, a second-grade teacher at Moreland Elementary School in West St. Paul, has introduced his students to e-mail — via a set of classroom Google Gmail accounts used on iPods under close supervision. Each account is associated with a classroom iPod Touch, which a student uses to send the

teacher morning journal entries and the like.

One of the iPods even has a Twitter app. Students use it to update a Twitter account at the school, which also part of the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan district.

Back at Somerset, second-graders in Mary Nelson's class emulate their fourth-grade classmates with giddy use of educational apps — though different ones, for simpler activities such as spelling short words.

That was recently enough to excite one boy, who exclaimed, "I just spelled my name!"

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> Break-in attacks

geographically separated, there are some very striking similarities as well."

Both break-ins Monday occurred in the 1000 block of Barrett Street North.

In the first, it's believed the intruder entered a woman's home through an unlocked back door as she shoveled snow, Schnell said. Inside, he confronted her husband, 66, and the two fought. The husband suffered a cut to his head in the struggle.

Betsy Dueholm, who lives across the street, said the husband came to her door. He had a bloody face, she said, and, "He said, 'Someone came in my house. Quick, call 911.'"

"I thought, 'Oh, my gracious sakes alive,'" said the woman, who has lived in her home for

Three St. Paul break-ins — one intruder?

Police are investigating whether recent break-ins are related.

1. Dec. 7: A man breaks into a home and ties up an 81-year-old woman before ransacking her house. She is found uninjured at least seven hours later.

2. Monday, 8:21 a.m.: Police are called after a man enters a home's unlocked back door and fights with the homeowner. The intruder flees.

3. Monday, 10:02 a.m.: A woman calls for help after an intruder ties up her and her 4-year-old granddaughter. The assailant is in the home about an hour before stealing her car.



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40 years. "We don't have things happen like this in our neighborhood."

The husband was taken to Regions Hospital, where he received stitches for a head

HOW TO HELP

Police ask anyone who sees the stolen four-door blue Chevrolet Lumina, license plate VMA 131, to call 911.

Police released surveillance photos of a "person of interest" in Monday's break-ins. The photos show a man who tried to use a credit card taken in one of the break-ins, police said. They asked anyone with information to call 911 or 651-291-1111.

The assailant is described as a black man in his mid-30s to early 40s, about 200 pounds, 6 feet tall. He had a nearly bald head and facial stubble, and was wearing a dark-colored jacket, black shirt, black jeans and black shoes.

wound and he was released, Schnell said.

Police, who were called at 8:21 a.m., could not find the attacker.

About 8:30 a.m., the 84-year-old woman said her attacker knocked on her side door. When she answered, the man was walking away, Schnell said. She opened it and called to see what he needed. But she became nervous and tried to close it as he approached,

Schnell said. He forced his way in and bound the woman and the 4-year-old, whom she was babysitting.

About an hour later, he fled with her purse, cell phone and car. The woman and child managed to free themselves and call police.

The child was not injured. The woman reported chest pains but did not need to be hospitalized, Schnell said.

Tawny Duque, who lives a

couple of houses away, described the attack as scary.

"I could have been next," she said. "If someone knocked on my door, I would have opened it to see what they wanted. We're all so trusting."

In the pre-dawn Dec. 7 attack, a man broke into an 81-year-old woman's home in the 1100 block of St. Paul Avenue. She gave the intruder money, but he demanded more and tied her up. He rummaged for valuables for at least an hour, she told police.

Police believe the man fled the area and called 911 at 8:32 a.m., but gave the wrong address.

The woman was found that afternoon, when a relative and another woman came to her home and called police.

Schnell stressed that these robberies were rare occurrences.

"Most of the time, the people that do knock on your door during the daytime are not there to cause you harm," he said.