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## Southwest Airlines Settles Lawsuit For 5.8 Million Drink Vouchers

The Huffington Post | By Katherine Bindley  
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Southwest Airlines has settled a lawsuit to the tune of an estimated \$29 million -- or [5.8 million unredeemed alcoholic beverages](#) valued at \$5 each, the Chicago Tribune reports.

"This settlement is a grand-slam result for the class, as consumers are recovering 100 cents on the dollar," Joseph Siprut, the Chicago attorney who represented the class against Southwest, told the news outlet.

An Illinois man brought the class-action suit against the airline on behalf of himself and any other [Southwest customer who received drink vouchers](#) before the airline altered its policy on expiration dates. The plaintiff reportedly bought tickets through Southwest's "Business Select" program and collected free drink coupons that did not specify a date by which they needed to be redeemed.

On Aug. 1, 2010, the airline changed its policy. The drink vouchers were now only good on the day the person was traveling, making those previously issued worthless.

According to the Tribune, it's estimated that there are 5.8 million eligible vouchers that were never redeemed. And even if eligible passengers don't have their vouchers anymore, the settlement still allows them to redeem new drink vouchers.

A [article on Law360](#) further explains:

Southwest also agreed to include expiration dates on the post-settlement vouchers and neither retroactively invalidate them nor shorten the expiration period.

The company also said that if it decides to restrict or limit use of the the new vouchers to the day of the flight for which the ticket was purchased, it will include that information in express, conspicuous language printed on the voucher.

It additionally agreed that if it fails to include expiration dates on the vouchers, then the vouchers may be redeemed on a Southwest flight at any point in time.

When the suit was reported by the Los Angeles Times in 2011, Whitney Eichinger, a Southwest spokeswoman, said the [decision to add an expiration date](#) was prompted by passengers making unauthorized photo copies of the vouchers.

The company [explained the decision](#) on its blog:

For years, Southwest Airlines has accepted all types of drink coupons on our planes -- regardless of their expiration dates. Rapid Rewards coupons. Business Select coupons. Old Company Club coupons. Coupons from the 80s, coupons from the 90s. And we've done so for all the right reasons. However, in an industry where the competition is always knocking (or banging) on the door and where watching the bottom-line is more important than ever, we owe it to our Employees, Customers, and Shareholders to find ways to operate smarter. We've reached a point where being so flexible with drink coupons has put us in a position of having far too many in circulation. To help purge the system of these excess coupons, we will start enforcing expiration dates on coupons over the course of the next year.

Still, according to the Los Angeles Times, the plaintiff argued that the [airline had committed a breach of contract](#).

"Southwest decided that it would make more money -- improve its bottom line -- by choosing not to honor the coupons that consumers had already paid and bargained for," the plaintiff's complaint said.

This isn't the only time [Southwest has faced a beverage-related suit](#). In September of this year, the company was slapped with another lawsuit after a woman claimed she was served hot tea that resulted in second-degree burns, CNN reported.

On Friday, the airline announced that [they'll be implementing new travel fees in 2013](#). According to Reuters, fares will be raised for flights on AirTran, which the company acquired last year.

Extra charges will also be tied to premium boarding positions, third bags and overweight bags. People who've bought restricted tickets and don't show up for flights will also face extra fees. The airline is planning to raise revenue by \$1.1 billion.