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Virgin Australia Plane Hits Ground Vehicle at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport

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– Categories: Crime



A Virgin Australia aircraft was struck by a ground vehicle at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport (MEL), causing significant damage to the plane's hull and raising renewed concerns about safety protocols during airport ground operations.

On July 28, 2025, at approximately 1:30 a.m., a Virgin Australia Boeing 737 parked at Terminal 3 was hit by a baggage tug during routine servicing. The tug made contact with the lower section of the aircraft's fuselage, damaging its structure and rendering the jet unfit for service. Virgin Australia confirmed the aircraft was immediately withdrawn for engineering inspection. "The aircraft has been grounded and is undergoing assessment by our maintenance team," a spokesperson said. Fortunately, no passengers or crew were on board at the time, and the tug operator escaped injury.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) has launched an investigation into the incident. The focus is expected to include human error, operational procedures, and equipment management. The airport's apron area, where the incident occurred, is among the busiest in the country and supports dozens of aircraft movements per hour.

This latest collision adds to a string of unusual and disruptive incidents at Melbourne Airport. Earlier this month, a live snake was discovered inside the cargo hold of another Virgin Australia flight, causing delays and raising biosecurity concerns. Meanwhile, a recent in-flight lithium battery fire between Sydney and Hobart further stretched the airline's operations.

Melbourne Airport, one of Australia's largest aviation hubs, handles approximately 24 million domestic passengers each year. While expansion plans are underway, including a \$3 billion third runway expected by 2031, industry experts say ground operations must evolve in parallel to meet increasing demand. Critics point to persistent issues with understaffing, limited oversight, and logistical bottlenecks, particularly during early morning and overnight shifts.

The airport is also under pressure due to the delayed airport rail link, now expected in 2033, which continues to push greater reliance on road-based services such as baggage handling and fueling. This has added strain to ground crew schedules and vehicle movement coordination.

While no injuries occurred, the incident serves as a critical reminder of the importance of rigorous safety standards. As demand for air travel grows, both airlines and airport operators are being urged to invest in infrastructure, training, and supervision to prevent future disruptions and maintain public confidence in aviation safety.