

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY**

Before the

**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Co-Chairman Inouye, and Members of the Committee. I am pleased to have this opportunity to testify before this Committee to discuss the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) strategies in aviation security and planned changes to implement those strategies.

Let me begin today by expressing my deepest sympathy to the family of Rigoberto Alpizar. As you know, Mr. Alpizar was shot and killed by Federal Air Marshals on the jet-way of an American Airlines plane in Miami. While his death is regrettable, our initial review of the facts indicates that the team of air marshals acted in a way that is consistent with the training they have received to protect other passengers, the flight crew, and the aircraft. This was an isolated incident, with no nexus to terrorism. As is routine for a law enforcement officer involved shooting, we are investigating the incident internally, and we will apply any lessons learned to future protocols and training.

I also want to acknowledge the understandable concern expressed by many thoughtful and serious people who worry that changes in TSA's prohibited items list may signal a weakening of aviation security. Let me assure you, this is not the case. We have had the benefit of the advice and input of many people in the past few months, and we have known that the changes would stir deep emotions. But I would not have pursued these changes if I did not believe that they are a critical element of an integrated plan to improve the security of the aviation system.

In summary:

- The security of the aviation system will be strengthened by these changes. Shifting attention from low security risks to address markedly higher security risks is a plus, not a minus, to security. Keeping small tools and small scissors on the prohibited items list might make people feel better, but it will not improve security or measurably reduce the risk that a terrorist will gain control of an airplane.

- These changes are motivated by security reasons, not concerns about resources or line speed. While I believe that we will see a more efficient system, that is a by-product of these changes. This effort is directed only at real security weaknesses that we must address.
- The changes announced are part of a complex mix of visible and invisible components -- some of which we can discuss in public and some that we cannot. The prohibited items changes are a public piece of the puzzle that fits in a larger context. The total security picture would be weakened without it.

This Committee has exerted strong leadership in shaping today's aviation security system, moving rapidly following 9/11 to shape the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA), and passing the Vision 100 and Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Acts.

Today we are orders of magnitude beyond where we stood on 9/11 in securing aviation travel. With the ATSA as its statutory foundation, TSA has worked with the airlines, airports, shipping industry, flight crews, law enforcement, and passengers to establish a robust aviation security system. That system now includes:

- A superb, well-trained Transportation Security Officer workforce that screens passengers, baggage, and cargo traveling on passenger planes;
- Federal Air Marshal Service law enforcement officers who fly anonymously on commercial passenger planes to provide physical security should an incident occur;
- Thousands of pilots who voluntarily participate in the Federal Flight Deck Officer program, which permits pilots who are trained to support the security regime from the cockpit to carry firearms;
- Over 700 flight crew members, including flight attendants, who have voluntarily taken TSA's Advanced Flight Crew Self-Defense course.
- Other local, State, and Federal law enforcement officers who travel armed as part of their normal duties;
- Hardened cockpit doors to prevent unauthorized access to the flight deck;
- Enhanced explosives and threat detection technology deployed in hundreds of airports; and
- A cadre of approximately 360 canine explosives detection teams screening baggage, cargo and, increasingly, carry-on items.

The public itself has added its own significant layer of security by its vigilance in looking for and reporting suspicious behavior, and the high likelihood that passengers will take action if an event occurs on an aircraft with or without an Air Marshal on board.

TSA has recently concluded a strategic assessment of our aviation security activities, and we are in the process of making changes that align with and reflect the principles that Secretary Chertoff introduced in the Department of Homeland Security Second Stage Review. To that end –

- Our work and our decisions are driven by risk;
- Our strategies are intended to promote Americans' freedom, privacy, prosperity, and mobility;
- We strive to be effective stewards of public resources; and
- We are building partnerships across every level of government, and with the private sector, our international counterparts, and with the American traveling public across all modes of transportation.

On December 2, 2005, I announced three changes in the way TSA operates in airports in conjunction with passengers. These changes reflect what we have learned from airlines, airports, law enforcement, and passengers, as well as our view of the current security risk environment. The changes include:

- Improvements in explosives detection training and technology;
- Modifications to the prohibited items list; and
- Changes to TSA security screening protocols.

The changes reflect not only a new and evolving threat environment, but also our determination to make smart decisions based on data and metrics, a practice that TSA will continue to employ.

Many of the improvements in our explosives detection capability are already in place; the remaining changes will take effect in airports throughout the country on December 22, 2005. This will give TSA Security Officers and the public time to understand and prepare for the changes. We expect the net effect of these changes to be improved security, as we direct resources toward higher risk areas and make our security protocols less transparent to potential terrorists. We do not expect that implementing these changes will result in significantly shorter passenger wait times, nor do we expect to see significantly longer passenger wait times.

An Enhanced Focus on Explosives Detection

While changes to the prohibited items list have attracted a great deal of attention, they are not the most important component of our changing strategy. The most significant element is the fact that we have evaluated our risk environment throughout the transportation sector, and based on a broad analysis of threat, vulnerability and consequence, we are focusing more on higher threat areas, such as explosives.

As I indicated earlier, since 9/11, TSA has implemented multiple layers of security to reduce the risk that terrorists could hijack and take control of an airplane. As terrorists adapt to the measures we have taken, we too, are adapting, and have put increased focus on the threats posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), a frequent weapon of choice for terrorists. To more effectively counter this threat, TSA continues to implement changes related to explosives detection and screening.

First, we have significantly increased the number of canine explosives detection teams. Canine teams can be used to search aircraft, cargo, vehicles, terminals, warehouses, passengers, and baggage. They move easily throughout the airport system and can post at multiple points during time periods that vary by shift and by day. Today, approximately 360 canine teams work at airports across the nation. We will continue to grow the canine program – it is highly effective, flexible, and economically reasonable, as we demonstrated during the Thanksgiving period when they were deployed in passenger areas.

Second, we have recently completed enhanced explosives detection training for over 18,000 TSOs. This training includes both classroom and hands-on experiences, and focuses particularly on identifying X-ray images of IED component parts, not just a completely assembled bomb. Within days of completing training, TSA security officers in St. Louis found a hidden explosive detonation device in a carry-on bag. Our performance in this area will continue to improve, as the rest of our screening workforce receives enhanced explosive detection training over the next six months and refresher training is incorporated into our regular weekly training programs.

Third, to reinforce this training, we have updated our database of threat images to include many more new IED images of all types. These images are randomly projected onto X-ray screens at checkpoints to help our security officers hone their detection skills and identify remedial training needs. Additionally, new standard operating procedures will encourage TSA Security Officers to work together more than ever before to find items that may pose a security threat.

Finally, just as we have invested in our people to help reduce the risk that explosives will be taken aboard a plane, we are also investing in technology for this purpose. Already, 43 explosives trace portal machines have been installed at 20 airports, and we will complete installation of an additional 16 machines at 6 airports by mid-December. This new technology uses puffs of air to help detect the presence of explosives on individuals. Site surveys, which will encompass between 80 and 100 of the Nation's larger airports, are ongoing for placement of the remaining portals that TSA will be installing. By the end of 2006, about 350 trace portal machines will be in operation throughout the country.

As deployment of this new technology moves ahead, we continue to use explosives trace detection units to accomplish screening of carry-on items for explosives residue. At passenger checkpoints, these devices are used to analyze residue from sample swabs of carry-on bags during random screening and selectee screening, as well as for resolution of suspect bags, shoes, and electronic items identified by an x-ray operator. Explosives trace detection units – nearly 1,300 devices -- are used at passenger checkpoints in every airport that TSA serves.

Applying Screening Resources to the Greatest Risk

As part of our continuing effort to review TSA practices in light of changing threats and the array of security measures now in place, we have also re-assessed the list of items that passengers are prohibited from taking with them onboard a plane.

As you know, an image of every carry-on bag is evaluated by a TSA Security Officer, who is responsible for identifying any items on the prohibited items list. If a prohibited item is suspected, the bag must be searched by hand. In the last two quarters of fiscal year 2005, TSA security officers found almost 9.4 million prohibited items in carry-on bags.

The reality is, we are opening a lot of bags to take away objects that do not pose a great risk. We found that a disproportionate amount of our resources go to bag searches directed at objects that do not pose a real threat of taking control of an aircraft.

Although we understand that some passengers and crew members would prefer a cabin environment in which no potential weapons exist, it is clear that goal is impossible to achieve. Pens, keys, belts and even bare hands can be used as weapons. The list of items that are now permitted on planes that could be turned into weapons is almost limitless, but we judge their threat to taking control of an aircraft as extremely limited. Similarly, our judgment is that removing small tools and small scissors from the prohibited items list does not measurably add to the vulnerability of our aviation system.

By carefully tracking the types of items that trigger secondary bag searches, we determined that small scissors and tools account for almost one-fourth of the prohibited items found in passenger carry-on bags. During the third and fourth quarters of fiscal year 2005, an estimated 1.7 million scissors were found at screening checkpoints. With these high numbers of scissors it is clear that TSOs are spending a very large amount of their time and attention focused on finding small scissors. In addition, TSOs found almost 500,000 tools in the third and fourth quarters of fiscal year 2005. Small screwdrivers, wrenches, and pliers made up a large majority of these tools.

It is these items – scissors with blades less than 4 inches long and tools like screwdrivers, wrenches, and pliers that are less than 7 inches long – that we will remove from the prohibited items list on December 22nd. Tools with cutting edges, bludgeons, crowbars, hammers and saws will continue to be prohibited, along with any tool that is more than 7 inches in length. I want to emphasize that ice picks or box cutters, and knives of any kind remain on the prohibited items list and are not allowed past the checkpoint.

Based on our research and analysis, I am convinced that the time now spent searching passengers' bags for small scissors and tools does not add to our security. These are not the tools of the terrorists. We must focus our attention on the far more dangerous threat of explosives.

Improving Security by Eliminating Predictability

The third set of changes we are implementing involve the protocols we use at screening checkpoints and other areas of the airports.

Our goal is to establish flexible protocols based on risk, so that terrorists cannot use the predictability of our security measures to their advantage when planning an attack. In the past, security measures at every airport were much the same. Whether you were a frequent flyer or a potential terrorist, you knew what to expect at the airport. With the changes we are implementing, that predictability will be gone.

Of course, the basics will not change: every passenger will still walk through a metal detector; and carry-on bags will be screened for weapons and explosives using X-ray equipment operated by TSOs. Suspect items will be referred for explosives screening using Explosives Trace Detection technology. All checked bags will continue to be screened for explosives using automated technology. But we will test and implement additional unpredictable screening techniques and procedures that will be easy for passengers to navigate, but difficult for terrorists to manipulate.

As I noted earlier, passengers may see more canine explosives detection teams circulating through the ticket counter and screening checkpoint areas. With our new protocols, some passengers may be randomly selected at the checkpoint, rather than the ticket counter, to undergo additional screening or have their shoes or carry-on bags tested for explosive materials.

In addition to these random screening techniques, those passengers who are subject to additional screening may notice a change in our pat-down procedure. In the past, TSA procedures called for a pat-down of the entire back and the front of the torso around the abdomen. In order to improve our ability to detect non-metal weapons and explosive devices that may be carried on the body, we will be extending our pat-down search to include the arms and the legs.

As with current procedures, only female security officers will conduct pat-downs of female passengers, and only male security officers will conduct pat-downs of male passengers. Security officers will continue the practice of communicating exactly what to expect before each step of the search procedure. Additionally, passengers may continue to request that additional screening be conducted in private.

We will pilot other activities as we move forward. Some will be visible, such as having one of our TSO's with special document verification training or equipment assist in checking passenger credentials. Some will not be visible.

Again, the prohibited items list and screening protocol changes I have outlined will go into effect on Thursday, December 22. All of the changes -- in our explosives detection capability, the prohibited items list, and TSA screening protocols -- are important to maintaining the effectiveness of our security process. We must be able to adapt quickly to changes in terrorist tactics, deploy resources effectively based on risk, and use unpredictability as a means to disrupt terrorist plots.

Finally, I want to emphasize that we continue to appreciate the help of industry employees, passengers, and local law enforcement officers in reporting suspicious behavior and suspicious incidents.

The traveling public helped to make the Thanksgiving travel weekend one of the smoothest in recent years. This was truly a team effort. The airports, airlines, law enforcement, and TSA worked closely together to manage a tremendous volume of passengers. And passengers contributed by preparing in advance with their travel plans and did a great job of helping each other by minimizing unnecessary alarms at the checkpoints. All of this contributed to short wait times and strengthened the system's overall security. Our continued security depends upon these important partnerships, and we hope that by giving the public advance notice of the coming changes, Americans will all have a similarly smooth travel experience during the coming holiday season.

Mr. Chairman, there is, unfortunately, no prohibited items list for terrorists conceiving an attack on the United States. Terrorists have at their disposal an almost limitless array of items to use in an attack on the world's most open and wide-ranging transportation system. We will never be able to create a perfectly sterile environment on airplanes or other modes of passenger transportation. That is why we rely on a multi-layered approach to security. With our partners in the intelligence community, law enforcement, government, and industry, TSA is committed to protecting the freedoms, privacy, prosperity and mobility that we, as Americans, all hold dear.

Thank you again for this important opportunity to report to you on our planned security changes, and I will be happy to respond to the Committee's questions.