Airport Security Screening

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Security Screening
The Basics

According to a recent press report, the United States Transportation Security Administration (TSA) administrator Edmund S. Hawley requested in an August 5, 2005 document a number of changes to airport screening, including proposals to allow knives, ice picks, throwing stars and bows and arrows to be carried onboard airplanes. The TSA also announced that some individuals will be exempt from airport security screening, including Members of Congress, Cabinet members, state governors, federal judges, high-ranking military officers, people with top-secret security clearances and airline pilots.

On May 13, 2005, a hearing was held by the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Economic Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Cybersecurity, to discuss exempting pilots from airport security screening. Speaking at that hearing were Debra Burlingame, Member, 9/11 Families for a Secure America, Captain Duane Woerth, President, Airline Pilots Association, and Candace Kolander, Air Safety, Health and Security Coordinator, AFA-CWA. It was apparent at that hearing that the Subcommittee majority members were not greatly moved by AFA-CWA concerns with respect to screening policies; rather, they seemed only to want to hear from the airline work group they felt had "real responsibilities". Now it appears that the TSA has that attitude as well; i.e., pilots should walk on through while flight attendants are left cooling their heels in security lines.

AFA-CWA has three main concerns regarding the proposed TSA policies:

#1) The TSA did not ask us for input and advice on these issues; moreover, AFA-CWA has had to learn about these proposed changes through the press.

#2) Should TSA allow any of the weapons listed above onboard commercial flights, flight attendants (and all other airplane occupants) will be put at increased risk.

#3) Flight attendants are subjected to the same level of screening and background checks as pilots (except for FFDOs); to exempt pilots from screening while ignoring other aviation employees who are comparably checked is ridiculous. In any case, given the threat of terrorism, AFA-CWA believes that a certain level of airport screening for all aviation employees is necessary.

On August 18, 2005, AFA-CWA sent a letter to the TSA to express our strong concerns with these proposed changes. We also issued a press release on the matter and the Washington Post and MSNBC provided media coverage. In addition, AFA-CWA will take these concerns to Capitol Hill to request that Congress recommend TSA modify their recent airport screening proposal.

AFA Activity and Hot Topics


Letter from AFA-CWA International President Patricia Friend to TSA Administrator Edmund S. Hawley, dated August 16, 2005.

References to News Articles
Scissors and knives allowed back on planes?; August 17, 2005: Flight attendants urged the federal government not to relax its rules on passengers’ carrying sharp objects onto planes. But airline pilots disagree. By Pete Williams, Justice correspondent, NBC News. Washington - Wednesday, the nation’s largest union of airline flight attendants urged the federal government not to relax its rules that ban passengers from carrying on items that could be used as weapons. But airline pilots say it would be a good move, allowing a better focus on actual threats.

TSA Proposal Questioned By Flight Attendants; By Sara Keaulani Goo, Washington Post Staff Writer, Wednesday, August 17, 2005; Page A05. The nation's largest flight attendants union yesterday questioned a federal government proposal to end the ban on knives, ice picks and razor blades on board commercial airplanes.

Airline Security Changes Planned, Threats Reassessed To Make Travel Easier for Public; By Sara Keaulani Goo, Washington Post Staff Writer, Saturday, August 13, 2005; Page A01. The new head of the Transportation Security Administration has called for a broad review of the nation's air security system to update the agency's approach to threats and reduce checkpoint hassles for passengers.

More Information

Transportation Security Administration

Department of Homeland Security

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