

TESTIMONY

Statement Of Monte R. Belger, Acting Deputy Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration

Before The Senate Committee On Governmental Affairs On Aviation Security Measures, Including The Screening Of Passengers And Property.

September 25, 2001.

Chairman Lieberman, Chairman Durbin, Senator Thompson, Senator Voinovich,
Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on the enhanced security measures that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has adopted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on September 11th. As a nation, we have suffered horrific losses, but we are resolved not to allow those losses to overwhelm us. We can be proud of America's response to this crisis; the stories of heroism, generosity, and patriotism are countless and compelling. We must gain strength from these examples as we face the many challenges that lie ahead of us. On behalf of the FAA and its employees, some of whom have suffered their own devastating losses, I would like to extend my sympathies to the many thousands of Americans who were victimized by the terrorists' actions. I assure you that all 48,425 employees of the FAA will continue to work night and day to make the air transportation system safe, secure, and ready to meet the needs of our travelling public. We are committed to meeting the challenges that the tragic events of September 11th present. Our energies are focused on maintaining a safe National Airspace System (NAS).

The nature of the threat facing America has changed. What we faced on September 11th was a new phenomenon--hijackers taking over commercial flights for the sole purpose of turning them into human-guided terrorist bombs of massive explosive power. Given the events of last week, assumptions underlying aviation security have fundamentally changed.

We are currently working with others in government to develop a full picture of what happened on September 11th, and while our investigation continues, we have already put new security measures in place. While I understand that the focus of today's hearing is on the security screening programs at our Nation's airports, I would first like to provide an overview of new security measures that we have implemented since September 11th.

None of these actions lessen the need to take a comprehensive look at how airport screening is undertaken from workforce, technology, and procedure standpoints. The Administration is looking at all options and has not ruled out any alternative at this time.

In response to these unprecedented attacks, the FAA substantially increased

security measures for U.S. airports and U.S. air carriers, and foreign air carriers with flights to the U.S. These measures were implemented immediately. Some are visible to the public, others are not. As you know, before we allowed our airports to reopen and air carriers to resume operations last week, airports and carriers had to meet these stringent new security measures through a certification process. I must tell you that we have had an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Federal government and the airport operators and carriers to implement these procedures so quickly and effectively.

Although the investigation of how the hijackers were able to gain control of the aircraft and what means they used to do so is still ongoing, it is apparent that enhanced security measures are essential to ensuring the security and safety of the U.S. travelling public. Following the attacks, the FAA ordered all airport terminals evacuated and required a thorough physical search for explosives and other dangerous weapons or objects in the terminal, using airport personnel and FAA certified K-9 teams where they were available. Similarly, all aircraft were thoroughly inspected. Before the airports reopened (except for Reagan National Airport) and air carriers returned to the skies, new security requirements were in place.

Passengers will now find they have to adjust to new restrictions and go through more steps before boarding an aircraft—and they must adjust their arrival times at airports accordingly. Vehicles near terminals are now monitored more closely, and unauthorized vehicles near the terminal area will be removed. We have ordered the discontinuance of curbside check-in and all off-airport check-in locations. We can no longer allow passengers to check in for their flights at hotels or other locations. Instead, we ask that all passengers with luggage go to the ticket counters to check in. Passengers not checking luggage can check in at the gate, but are required to show a ticket or e-ticket printed receipt to pass through security checkpoints. Only ticketed passengers and authorized persons will be allowed to proceed past airport screeners to board their flights. The only exceptions are for those with a demonstrated need to be inside the sterile area, such as parents meeting a child who is traveling unaccompanied or passengers with special needs.

At all airports, increased numbers of uniformed and plainclothes security, law enforcement officers, and canine officers have been deployed to provide greater deterrence, surveillance, and response in the case of an emergency. Access points to secured areas of airports have been reduced to the operational minimum, and airports have increased random security checks and ID checks throughout their entire terminal areas. All cutting instruments, including knives, box cutters, scissors, and straight-edged razors, are banned from carry-on luggage and may no longer be sold in the "sterile" terminal areas--those areas beyond the security checkpoints. Although initially no cargo or mail was permitted on passenger flights, we have now allowed an air carrier to accept cargo from shipping companies with well-documented, established relationships with the air carrier, or from freight forwarders with FAA-approved security programs. Letter class mail, certified as such by the U.S. Postal Service, is also being accepted for transport on passenger flights.

Because the focus of this hearing is on security screening, a little background may be helpful. Since the early 1970s, the FAA has required the screening of passengers and property carried on board an aircraft to ensure that no unlawful or dangerous weapons, explosives, or other destructive substances are carried aboard. Screening is conducted at the initial passenger checkpoints of people and property entering the "sterile" terminal areas. In most airports, these checkpoints are located at the entry point of airport concourses. We are all familiar with these checkpoints, with their metal detectors and x-ray machines, where carry-on bags are placed on a conveyor belt and examined as they pass

through the machine.

Screeners are a critical link in the performance security chain. We can all agree that properly trained and qualified people who are on the job longer tend to perform better. Concerns over low pay, high turnover rates, and boredom on the job have spurred efforts to improve the standards for screener training and job performance. The government can indirectly influence private sector pay through higher performance standards that require more training, and more investment in individuals who do it well.

Under current law, the FAA sets the standards for screener selection, training and testing, and the airlines implement those requirements, usually through contracting with security screening companies. Before they are hired, security screeners and their supervisors are subject to an employment investigation and, in some cases, a criminal history background check (i.e. an FBI fingerprint check). Last year, under the Airport Security Improvement Act of 2000 (Security Act), Congress expanded the requirement for a fingerprint check to all new screeners, to be phased in first at major airports, which has already been done, and then to all other regulated airports by November 2003.

Among other security measures, the Security Act directed the FAA to accelerate its rulemaking on the certification of screening companies and set a minimum of 40 hours of classroom instruction or its equivalent, 40 hours of on-the-job training, and passage of a written and practical, on-the-job exam. Our rule will not only incorporate those requirements, it will also give FAA direct oversight of screening companies; provide uniform standards of testing of security screeners; and track the ability of screening companies at checkpoints to meet performance criteria. Although this rule is now ready to be published, in light of recent events, action on the rule has been temporarily suspended as part of an ongoing evaluation of what further security measures are needed.

For effective performance, screeners must be given the best tools available to do the job, and must be trained to use them properly. In addition to the conventional screening tools, hand-held and walk-through metal detectors and the x-ray system, screeners now have Explosives Trace Detection (ETD) devices, that can detect the presence of explosive materials in a passenger's carry-on items. Currently, 778 of these devices are in use at 170 airports.

Explosives Detection Systems (EDS) is another available tool to screen checked baggage. It detects, without human intervention, the amounts and types of explosives likely to be used by terrorists to cause catastrophic damage to commercial aircraft. Currently, EDS is used to screen *checked* bags belonging to persons identified by the Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS). CAPPS allows the air carrier to focus EDS screening on a manageable number of passengers -- those who we cannot discount as potential threats to civil aviation, based on parameters developed within the counter-terrorism community and reviewed by the Department of Justice to ensure the methods of passenger selection are non-discriminatory. CAPPS also selects a certain percentage of passengers on a random basis for additional screening.

One of the new means of testing and measuring screener proficiency is software technology known as the Threat Image Projection (TIP) system, installed on conventional x-ray machines. TIP electronically inserts images of possible threats (e.g., a gun, a knife or an explosive device) on x-ray and explosives detection system monitors as if they were within a bag being screened. Its purpose is to provide training, keep screeners alert, and measure screener performance. High scores in detecting TIP images equate to a high probability of detecting actual bombs and dangerous weapons. Not only can TIP data be potentially used to assess screener performance over time, but the results can

also be used to analyze any correlation between performance and experience. New images will be added to the FAA-approved TIP library being installed on the x-ray machines at the checkpoints to improve screener vigilance and training. As of September 16th, 678 x-ray units at airports across the country were equipped with TIP.

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack, the steps we took to strengthen security at our airports included, as I noted above, enhanced screening procedures at passenger security checkpoints. We have also required the constant use of hand wands by screeners. Previously, hand wands were primarily used when an individual set off the alarm when passing through a metal detector. Now, screeners will use the hand wands not only in those instances, but also for continuous random checks of people moving through the checkpoints. Also, all items must now be x-rayed or physically inspected. No item may be passed around a metal detector. In addition, CAPPs has also been adjusted and we are exploring the potential for CAPPs to be used in conjunction with checkpoint screening.

Again, only persons with tickets (or evidence showing an electronic ticket) and authorized persons such as those accompanying passengers with special needs or a minor traveling alone will be screened and allowed through security checkpoints. Generally, family and friends must stay behind. This action greatly reduces the number of persons being screened, thereby focusing the attention of screeners where it truly belongs--on passengers boarding aircraft.

As we make these changes and strive to improve the quality of our passenger screening system, we want to assure everyone that their rights will be respected. Also, people are asking if they are now going to be frisked before boarding. Some may have to be, but no one will be frisked unless that person is unable to clear screening another way and agrees to be frisked. Of course, a person who is not cleared will not be permitted on the aircraft.

It has only been a few days since the FAA's enhanced security measures were put in place by airports and carriers. Admittedly, travelers have had to adjust their travel plans to arrive at airports earlier to allow for more time in getting to their gates. As air carrier operations gradually increase and the system is brought back to a more normal level of activity, we will continuously monitor the effectiveness of these measures and work with airports and carriers to refine them, and expand them, if necessary. At the same time, we recognize that there are still lessons to be learned from the events of September 11th. We know that, in addition to the steps we took immediately following the attacks, we also need a more deliberative examination of what we have done and what we still can do to provide all Americans with the highest possible levels of safety and security. To that end, on September 16th, Secretary Mineta created two Rapid Response Teams to provide in the near term other recommendations for improving security in the national aviation system. Working with senior DOT and FAA experts will be eight national leaders from the aviation and law enforcement communities. One Team will focus on increasing security at the nation's airports; the other will examine security on board aircraft, with particular attention to cockpit access. Ways of improving security screening are certainly part of the aviation security effort. We look forward to the Team recommendations, which are due no later than October 1st.

Mr. Chairman, I want to assure you that the Secretary, the Administrator and I are doing everything in our power to bring the Nation's air transportation system back into full operation with the highest levels of safety possible. Working together--Government, industry and American citizens--we will do it. In a democracy, there is always a balance between freedom and security. Our

transportation systems, reflecting the value of our society, have always operated in an open and accessible manner. And, they will do so again.

That concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)