

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Government Reform Committee to Review
TSA Passenger Screening Operations

Davis Finds Results of Recent Tests 'Disconcerting'

Washington, D.C. – House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) sent a letter Saturday to Transportation Security Administration Administrator Adm. James M. Loy, informing him that the Committee will be conducting an extensive review of all TSA operations, with a specific focus on airline passenger screening.

A copy of the letter follows:

October 18, 2003

Admiral James M. Loy
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
TSA Headquarters Building
West Tower, 12th Floor, TSA-5
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Admiral Loy:

I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for the efforts you have made since the creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). The daunting task of protecting America's transportation system couldn't be more critical in today's threat environment. And the Committee on Government Reform recognizes the difficult task of airline passenger screening in particular.

Despite significant seizures of prohibited items from passengers going through TSA security checkpoints, this week's events highlight possible weaknesses in the system which need to be addressed. I am specifically referring to the October 16th discovery of weapons, and other suspicious items on two Southwest Airlines planes. According to press reports, notes accompanying the weapons indicated that the planted items were intended to challenge the TSA checkpoint security procedures.

These two incidents were not merely embarrassments to America's transportation security apparatus. As a result of the discovery, TSA ordered all 7,000 aircraft in the commercial fleet to be searched, thus, increasing costs to carriers, the federal government, and ultimately, the consumer.

Further raising the Committee's concerns about passenger screening are recent Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS-IG) report and a General Accounting Office (GAO) report both citing significant weaknesses in the testing and training procedures for TSA airport screeners. The DHS-IG investigation found that testing was designed to maximize the likelihood TSA employees would pass tests rather than ensuring that only competent and well-trained employees were operating explosive detection systems. While the GAO report cited deficient supervisory training programs and a failure to collect adequate information on screener performance in detecting threat objects.

More disconcerting was the DHS-IG's covert testing of passenger security screening operations. According to press articles, IG investigators were able to bring knives, a bomb, and a gun through Logan International Airport without being detected.

In accordance with our oversight obligations, this letter is to inform you that the Committee intends to begin a review of TSA operations, with a specific focus on passenger screening. Please provide the following information to the Committee by Monday, November 3, 2003:

1. A written overview of testing procedures and training regimen used to certify TSA airport screening personnel, including:
 - a. The course curriculum;
 - b. Training materials;
 - c. Number of course hours required;
 - d. Copies and answers of examinations;
 - e. A detailed explanation of all other testing/training mechanisms used;
 - f. Pass/fail rates; and
 - g. Criteria for defining poor or unacceptable performance of employees during the course of training.

2. With regard to the annual screener certification program, provide the following information:
 - a. A description of the program;
 - b. The level of performance the screeners must achieve to be certified;
 - c. The dates for the start and completion of the program; and
 - d. The steps or actions taken with employees who fail the annual certification program.
3. The results of the Screener Performance Improvement Study and actions planned to address any deficiencies identified by the study.
4. The performance metrics for the contractors hired to conduct such testing and training, and whether the contractors are incentivized for generating higher pass rates.
5. Upon completion of training, explain performance standards used to evaluate successful or failing airport screeners, and how often those standards are reviewed.
6. An explanation of the command structure for each TSA passenger screening checkpoint, including:
 - a. How supervisors are selected;
 - b. The training supervisors receive prior to undertaking supervisory responsibilities;
 - c. The recurrent or remedial training supervisors receive; and
 - d. The performance metrics for such supervisors.
7. With regard to TSA's program for covert testing of passenger screening operations, provide the following information:
 - a. The criteria for selecting airports for testing;
 - b. The means by which testing is conducted;
 - c. The number of TSA personnel dedicated to covert testing; and
 - d. The differences between the TSA covert testing program and the Federal Aviation Administration's program.

Finally, we request that TSA provide to Committee staff a briefing covering the details of the Southwest Airlines incidents, the results of the investigation to date, and whether any additional prohibitive items were discovered during the recent searches of all commercial aircraft.

Sincerely,

Tom Davis
Chairman

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