

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of Inspector General

Transportation Security Administration's Procedures For Law Enforcement Officers Carrying Weapons On Board Commercial Aircraft (Unclassified Summary)



Office of Audits

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Homeland
Security

Preface

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General was established by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (*Public Law 107-296*) by amendment to the Inspector General Act of 1978. This is one of a series of audit, inspection, and special reports prepared by our office as part of our DHS oversight responsibilities to promote economy, effectiveness and efficiency within the department.

This report represents an abbreviated version of our report containing sensitive security information that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Transportation Security Administration's operating procedures for law enforcement officers to carry weapons on board commercial aircraft. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observations, and a review of applicable documents.

The information contained in this report has been developed to the best knowledge available to us, and had been discussed in draft with appropriate management officials. It is our hope that this report will result in more effective, efficient, and economical operations. We express our appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard L. Skinner".

Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General

*Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General*

Introduction

This report presents the results of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General's review of the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) procedures and controls to screen law enforcement officers (LEO) carrying handguns on board commercial aircraft. Congressman James L. Oberstar, Ranking Democratic Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure requested the review. The Congressman asked us to determine whether current operating procedures ensure the safe and secure transport of weapons on commercial aircraft and to report on the number of federal, state and local government LEOs (other than federal air marshals) who have been authorized to carry weapons on commercial aircraft.

We reviewed operating procedures and observed security practices at three airports. In addition, we interviewed various federal agencies including TSA, Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Air Marshal Service, and Department of Justice officials, as well as representatives from major airlines and airline industry associations.

Executive Summary

Procedures to verify the identity of LEOs flying armed need to be strengthened. TSA needs to increase assurances that its primary control can verify that an individual is who he/she claims to be. To resolve this issue, TSA started a pilot program in July 2004 to develop a uniform biometric identification system for LEOs. The pilot program is not complete and is scheduled to continue through November 2005.

*Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General*

The U.S. Department of Justice estimated there were over 801,000 federal, state or local LEOs, however, the number authorized to fly armed is unknown.¹ Generally, all federal LEOs are authorized to fly armed if they have a mission need to do so. Whereas, only selected state and local LEOs are authorized to fly armed, and this generally includes those LEOs escorting prisoners or serving as bodyguards for state officials.

¹ U.S. Department of Justice reported that as of June 2002 there were 93,000 federal LEOs, and as of June 2000, there were 708,022 state and local LEOs.

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