

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

**Office of Inspector General**

**Review of Department's Handling of  
Suspicious Passengers Aboard Northwest  
Flight 327  
(Unclassified Summary)**



**OIG-06-31**

**March**

Office of Inspector General

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**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. The unabbreviated report contains sensitive security information, addressing the specific circumstances relating to Northwest Flight 327, including the Department's handling of suspicious passengers and activities, and identified lessons learned from the incident. The report is based on interviews with employees and officials of DHS, and other Federal agencies and non-governmental institutions, 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

## **Introduction**

This report presents the results of the Department of Homeland Security (Department) Office of Inspector General's (OIG) review of the Department's handling of suspicious passengers and activities aboard Northwest Airlines Flight 327 (Flight 327) from Detroit to Los Angeles on June 29, 2004. On this flight, 13 Middle Eastern men behaved in a suspicious manner that aroused the attention and concern of the flight attendants, passengers, air marshals, and pilots.

The objectives of our review were to (1) determine the specific circumstances relating to Flight 327, including the Department's handling of the suspicious passengers before boarding, during flight, and after the plane landed; and (2) identify any lessons learned as a result of the suspicious incident.

We reviewed policies, procedures, documents, and investigative case files. Furthermore, we interviewed Department officials and employees, officials of various other relevant Federal agencies, four major airlines, ten airline industry associations, and six Flight 327 passengers who were not part of the group of 13 suspicious passengers.

## **Executive Summary**

The Department's internal system for communicating and coordinating information on suspicious passengers, activities, and incidents in the gate area and aboard aircraft needs improvement. In addition, both the Federal Air Marshal Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have statutory authority to investigate in-flight incidents, thereby causing possible confusion, duplication, and the potential for compromising investigative cases.

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We made recommendations to improve the FAMS' ability to communicate and the Department's coordination and information sharing.

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