

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**Office of Inspector General**

**Letter Report:**

**TSA's Management of Aviation Security  
Activities at the Jackson-Evers  
International Airport**



**OIG-07-73**


**August 2007**



Homeland  
Security

August 29, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR: Edmund "Kip" Hawley  
Assistant Secretary  
Transportation Security Administration

FROM:   
Richard L. Skinner  
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *TSA's Management of Aviation Security Activities at the Jackson-Evers International Airport*

Pursuant to a request from Congressman Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, we are conducting a review of the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) management of aviation security activities at Jackson-Evers International Airport. The objectives of our review are to determine: (1) whether Transportation Security Officers (TSO) at the Jackson-Evers International Airport received advanced notice of any covert testing; (2) whether TSOs report the discovery of firearms and other dangerous prohibited items as required in TSA policy and directives; and (3) whether existing processes, which authorize certain individuals to fly while armed, need strengthening.

Our review is currently ongoing, but we have already developed findings concerning aviation security activities at the Jackson-Evers International Airport. Under most circumstances, we present findings and recommendations to senior Department of Homeland Security officials based upon completed fieldwork before finalizing reports. However, we want to provide you with this information because we expanded the scope of our review from the Chairman's original request to include other airports, and the project will take more months to complete. We ask that you treat this information as provisional in nature, and not conclusive of our findings and recommendations.

To date, we have reviewed TSA policies and procedures regarding covert testing, the reporting of incidents, and the flying armed program. We interviewed TSA headquarters officials, Transportation Security Operation Center employees, and Federal Air Marshal Service staff. We also interviewed federal law enforcement officers (LEOs) from our Office of Investigations, the U.S. Secret Service, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), CBP's Office of Field Operations, CBP's Office of Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), ICE's Office of Detention and Removal Operations, ICE's Office of Investigations, and ICE's Federal Protective Service, as well as state and local LEOs, to gain a better understanding of LEO experiences in the flying armed

program. In addition, we contacted staff at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center to obtain information on initial and advanced training provided to LEOs on flying armed. Finally, we performed a site visit of the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Virginia to obtain an operational perspective of TSA's management of aviation security activities. We looked at TSA screening operations, commercial airline carrier and airport authority and police practices prior to our fieldwork.

During the week of March 12, 2007, we conducted fieldwork at the Jackson-Evers International Airport in Mississippi. We performed over 38 interviews with TSA, commercial airline carrier, and airport authority employees and police. We interviewed all TSA management officials as well as a cross-section of TSOs.

### **Covert Testing**

We have determined that TSOs at the Jackson-Evers International Airport received advance notice of covert testing conducted by TSA's Office of Inspection on February 12, 2004. However, TSA's Office of Inspection did not provide the advance notice of covert testing; rather it was TSA employees at the Jackson-Evers International Airport that provided the advance notice to other TSA employees at this airport. Our conclusion is based upon statements made by TSOs, or TSA management employees who communicated to other TSA employees that such testing was to occur. Statements made ranged from "be on our P's and Q's the red-team is in the area," to the specific gender and race of the tester, the type of test items used, and the location of test items in checked and carry-on baggage, or the location of such items on the tester. We could not identify, with absolute certainty, where the advance information originated from, but this information was communicated to certain individuals at all levels of TSA personnel at the Jackson-Evers International Airport.

We are assessing TSA's covert testing program to determine whether the advance notice provided by TSA employees at Jackson-Evers International Airport was an incident isolated to that airport. In addition, we will determine whether additional safeguards should be in place to ensure the integrity of covert testing so that results are accurate and reflect actual operational capability and effectiveness. We will discuss our findings and recommendations in greater detail in the final report.

### **Reporting Prohibited Items**

We are still conducting fieldwork to determine whether incidents that should be reported to TSA headquarters, such as the discovery of firearms and other dangerous prohibited items, are reported as required by TSA policy and directives. At this time, we have not developed specific findings or formulated recommendations. We will discuss the reporting of prohibited items in the final report.

### **Law Enforcement Officers Flying Armed**

TSA's Office of Law Enforcement/Federal Air Marshals Service and Office of Security Operations have responsibility for the Law Enforcement Officers Flying Armed program. There are several opportunities to enhance and strengthen the flying armed program. For example, at the Jackson-Evers International Airport we reviewed TSA Armed Law Enforcement Officer Sign-In Logs. A number of the logs did not contain requested information on the officer's badge number, the officer's

agency affiliation, the agency address, or flight number. Further, on August 26, 2005, Jackson, Mississippi's Mayor flew armed, but the log did not include his badge number as required. Also on November 1, 2005, when the Mayor flew armed, the log did not contain the required initials of the airport law enforcement officer who verified the Mayor's paperwork, credentials, and badge.

In addition, whether it is permissible for a LEO to fly armed must be weighed against the need to do so in the official conduct of duty. Thus, the reasons for permitting a LEO to fly armed should be scrutinized beyond merely meeting the applicable criteria of CFR §1544.219, "Carriage of Accessible Weapons." For example, when Congress passed the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*, the law directed TSA to establish a LEO credentialing system that incorporates biometric identification technology by April 16, 2005.<sup>1</sup> Biometric technology uses computerized methods to identify a person by their unique physical traits, such as fingerprints or iris recognition scanning. A biometric identification card would not only ensure that all LEOs flying armed are *bona fide*, but also that their agency has approved their need to fly armed through the issuance of this card.

We are still reviewing documentation and performing program analysis. Our goal is to make recommendations that are useful for all program partners, TSA, commercial airline carriers, airport authorities and police, and federal, state, and local LEOs, while maintaining official conduct of duty requirements, and safe flight operations for officers and the flying public. Our findings and recommendations will be discussed in greater detail in the final report.

Should you have any questions, please call me, or your staff may contact Carlton I. Mann, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections, at (202) 254-4100.

cc: Secretary  
Deputy Secretary  
General Counsel  
Chief of Staff  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
Chief Security Officer  
Under Secretary for Management  
Assistant Secretary for Policy  
Director of Operations Coordination  
DHS OIG Liaison  
TSA Audit Liaison

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<sup>1</sup> *Public Law 108-458*, Title IV – Transportation Security, Subtitle B – Aviation Security, Section 4011(a)(6).

Appendix A

Major Contributors to the Report

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Marcia Moxey Hodges, Chief Inspector, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspections

Angela Garvin, Senior Inspector, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspections

Ryan Carr, Inspector, Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspections

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