



United States Department of State

*Office of Foreign Missions
Washington, D.C. 20520*

NOTICE

Regarding TSA Baggage Screening

In response to the concerns of foreign missions about the introduction of a checked baggage screening conducted by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) prior to air travel, the Office of Foreign Missions provides the following general information:

One of the many consequences of the events of September 11, 2001, has been a steady increase in inspections of airline baggage by the TSA. In addition to examining randomly selected carry-on items, TSA began screening all checked bags on December 31, 2002. In some instances, the screening includes opening luggage after it has been checked in by the passenger.

Leaving bags unlocked will avoid the potential need for them to be opened forcibly. TSA is moving toward providing travelers with free, padlock-like seals that screeners can snip open if a search is necessary. But for now, air travelers are advised to use cable or zip ties as an alternative to baggage locks. If a checked bag is searched, a statement to that effect will be inserted in the bag to notify the owner.

TSA has developed bag search plans with each of the airports in the U.S. Besides the large Explosive Detection System (EDS) machines, screening will be done using such methods as explosives trace detector machines, explosives-sniffing dogs, passenger-bag matching, and hand searches. OFM reminds the diplomatic community that the Vienna Conventions do not prohibit the searching of luggage if there is suspicion of contraband, and any luggage that triggers a response by the EDS, explosives detector machines, dogs, or fails passenger-bag matching falls under the suspicion of holding contraband.

In order to ensure that luggage screening proceeds smoothly, TSA provides the following packing tips:

- Do not pack food or beverages in checked bags.
- Pack footwear on top of other contents.
- Put personal belongings in clear plastic bags to reduce chances of a TSA screener having to handle them.
- Spread books out – do not stack books.
- Leave gifts unwrapped, should screening require them to be opened.
- Put scissors, pocketknives, and other sharp items in checked bags; never carry-on.
- DO NOT PLACE FILM IN CHECKED BAGS BECAUSE SCREENING EQUIPMENT WILL DAMAGE IT.
- For other tips, visit www.TSATravelTips.us.

OFM is ready at any time to provide advice and assistance. If you have any questions on baggage screening, call our Customs liaison staff at 202 895-3640 or 895-3618.

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