



SAFESKY CASE STUDY - GUNS AT AIRPORT SECURITY

News / Airports / Routes



Some news attracts our attention more than others. One of the latest cases: *Two loaded firearms were discovered by the Transport Security Administration (TSA) personnel in a passenger's carry-on backpack at Seattle Tacoma International Airport (SEA). During the routine screening at the security checkpoint, TSA officers detected the firearms in the bag of a male traveler who was ticketed for Honolulu, Hawaii. The law enforcement agents confiscated the firearm before considering the traveler for penalties for breaking the TSA regulations. We asked SAFESky Managing Director Frederick Reitz for his comments on this case.*

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) reported intercepting 3,251 firearms at US security checkpoints between January 1, 2023, and June 30, 2023. In 2022, the TSA had stopped 3053 guns at checkpoints, of which 86% were loaded. The TSA was Established in 2001 after the September 11th attacks on the United States. At the time, the FBI and other Federal agencies believed that the terrorists could sneak knives and box cutters through airport checkpoints due to lax security agencies and the tendency of airlines and airports to hire the lowest bidder for security checkpoints. The TSA and the newly created Department of Homeland Security implemented new

checkpoint procedures, purchased advanced screening technology, and established civil penalties for individuals who violated civil and criminal laws.

When the TSA finds individuals toting either loaded firearms — or unloaded firearms with accessible ammunition — they may face fines starting at \$3,000, plus a criminal referral to law enforcement. Those with "aggravating circumstances," including a history of carrying loaded weapons into security checkpoints, could face the maximum penalty, and if they violated a state or Federal law, the case will be referred to the local authorities.

TSA is also revoking PreCheck eligibility for at least five years for any passenger caught with a firearm, and it routinely conducts "enhanced screening" for those passengers to ensure no other threats are present.

Once the firearm is detected during the screening process, the passenger is escorted to a secure area to be interviewed by TSA investigators. Common excuses include:

- 1) I forgot to remove the weapon from my bag
- 2) I took the wrong bag
- 3) My spouse packed my bag
- 4) I have a concealed weapon permit

No matter what the excuse, the fact is that if you are carrying a weapon, you need to know where it is at all times. Leaving a loaded gun in a backpack or carry-on suitcase that could be accessible to others is not a good safety practice.

The number of incidents involving weapons is increasing, and while most passengers involved meant no harm, the possibility of a gun in the secure area of an airport or on board a plane is a genuine concern to aviation officials. We cannot allow a weapon to come into the hands of an individual who intends to harm themselves or others while flying. TSA and other agencies continue to train and practice for unplanned events, but as you travel, be aware of your surroundings, observe unusual or suspicious behaviors, and report them to the appropriate authorities.

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