

This is more than 14 years old.

Report: TSA wasting money on screening machines

Body scanners stored or improperly tested, barely used



By Shaun Waterman
The Washington Times
Wednesday, May 9, 2012

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is wasting hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars by allowing screening machines to languish in warehouses rather than deploying them at U.S. airports, congressional investigators said Wednesday.

When the new screening units finally were installed, they were not properly tested and were used only for very short periods of time in many locations, the investigators said.

And the public is not allowed to know whether the machines, which are designed to detect nonmetallic underwear bombs like the one al Qaeda planned to use this week, are effective, they said.

The charges, which TSA denies, were aired at a joint hearing of the House Transportation and Infrastructure and House Oversight and Government Reform committees.

“TSA is wasting hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars by inefficiently deploying screening equipment and technology to commercial airports,” states the report, prepared by committee staff investigators.

About 5,700 pieces of security equipment, with a total value of \$184 million, are stored in a TSA warehouse, the report states.

Eighty-five percent of the equipment has been stored for more than six months, and more than a third for more than a year. One piece has been in storage for six years, more than half its useful life, the report says.

The report estimates that the depreciating value of the equipment during its time in storage cost the agency \$23 million.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisement

TSA Chief Financial Officer David R. Nicholson told the hearing that \$184 million – the value of the equipment in storage – is only about 5 percent of the value of all the security equipment the agency has.

He said TSA bought equipment in advance so it would be available on short notice for airport managers who had to schedule construction or other work before it could be installed.

The fate of the new screening machines is the latest in a long line of TSA procurement failures, said Rep. John L. Mica, Florida Republican and chairman of the Transportation Committee.

Between 2004 and 2006, he noted, the agency spent more than \$30 million buying explosive-trace-detection portals, known as “puffers,” for use at passenger screening checkpoints.

“Where are the puffers?” Mr. Mica asked, adding that only half of them were ever deployed and the agency found they didn’t work.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisement

Rep. Darryl E. Issa, California Republican and chairman of the Oversight Committee, asked an investigator from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) if the new advanced imaging technology screening machines would be able to detect a nonmetallic underwear bomb.

It was just such a device that al Qaeda terrorists in Yemen had planned to

use against a U.S.-bound airliner, according to U.S. officials last week.

“We do know the answer to that,” said Stephen Lord, GAO’s director of homeland security and justice issues. But he added the answer is classified and could only be given in a closed session.

“I’m going to predict the answer will be ‘No,’” Mr. Issa said.

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisement

In previous public testimony, the GAO has said only that it “remains unclear whether the [new machines] would have been able to detect” the underwear bomb used in the thwarted attack against a U.S. airliner on Christmas Day 2009

.
TSA has installed about 700 of the new screening machines in more than 180 of the 462 U.S. commercial airports, at a cost of nearly \$167 million, according to agency figures.

Copyright © 2026 The Washington Times, LLC. [Click here for reprint permission.](#)

STORY TOPICS
