



Transportation
Security
Administration

Fact Sheet

October 22, 2008
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SECURE FLIGHT FINAL RULE

History

Under security directives passed after 9/11, airlines have had the responsibility for properly matching their passengers' names to the No-Fly and Selectee lists provided to them by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). TSA doesn't own these watch lists, but is a customer of the Terrorist Screening Center, a component of the Federal Bureau of Investigation that is responsible for maintaining the consolidated database of terrorist watch lists. Because each aircraft operator conducts its own matching process, the system can be very inconsistent. This is why the same passenger will often have trouble obtaining a boarding pass, or be told they are on a watch list, by one airline and not another.

In response to the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and recommendations from the 9/11 Commission, TSA created Secure Flight to take over passenger watch list matching from airlines. This new process will be more effective, efficient, and consistent, offering improvements in both security and customer service for the traveling public. TSA expects Secure Flight to add a vital layer of security to our nation's commercial air transportation system while maintaining the privacy of passenger information.

Overview

Secure Flight is a passenger pre-screening program that will match limited passenger information against government watch lists to identify known and suspected terrorists, prevent known and suspected terrorists from boarding an aircraft, facilitate legitimate passenger air travel, and protect individuals' privacy.

How Secure Flight Works

Airlines already collect information when passengers make a reservation to travel. Secure Flight will add two data elements (see below) that airlines do not currently collect, however, Secure Flight will only receive these limited data elements, not the full amount of data that airlines collect as part of their reservation process. This data will be transmitted to TSA up to 72 hours prior to intended travel via a highly secure system so that the agency can determine if the passenger is a known or suspected terrorist or a legitimate traveler. By providing this limited additional information, passengers greatly reduce their chance of being misidentified as an individual on a watch list.

Required Information

Information required by Secure Flight:

- Full Name
- Itinerary
- Date of Birth
- Gender

The following pieces of information are optional:

- Redress Number (if available)
- Passport Info (if traveling internationally)

By providing this optional information, legitimate travelers greatly reduce the probability of being misidentified as a known or suspected terrorist. For example, a hypothetical individual named John Smith with a birthday of 01/01/76 is on the no-fly list. Legitimate travelers named John Smith providing date of birth and other optional information are much less likely to be misidentified as the individual on the no-fly list.

How the System Works Today

Today TSA provides airlines with copies of the watch lists and the airlines check reservations against those lists using unique systems and with varying degrees of efficiency. When an individual appears to be on a list, the airline calls TSA to manually determine if the individual, typically waiting at the ticket counter, is in fact the individual on the watch list. This process, while effective in keeping known and suspected terrorists off airplanes, is much less efficient and effective than Secure Flight will be when implemented.

Secure Flight Benefits

Secure Flight will streamline and simplify the watch list matching process by moving watch list matching responsibilities, currently performed by dozens of air carriers, to TSA. This will create consistency for travelers and help prevent misidentification. The program enhances the security of commercial air travel, protects the privacy of the traveling public and provides more consistent customers service.

Traveler Data

Secure Flight harmonizes security and traveler privacy by utilizing data elements already required by airlines to make flight reservations. This additional information required by the airline to identify the flight number, date of travel and record number will be supplied to Secure Flight as well. Secure Flight does not assign a score to individuals, use commercial data, or predict behavior.

Information sent from airlines to TSA and results transmitted back to the airlines will be protected using the highest standard of government data protection and encryption.

Secure Flight Rollout

Secure Flight will be implemented in two phases. The program will initially assume the watch list matching responsibility for passengers on domestic flights from aircraft operators, with implementation beginning in early 2009. In the second stage of implementation, which is targeted to begin in late 2009, the Secure Flight program would assume, from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and international carriers, the watch list matching function for passengers on international flights.

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