



Cargo Screening Narrows

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Federal security officials are jumpstarting tougher screening requirements for air cargo, adding a new requirement this month that all shipments on certain passenger aircraft be individually screened.

The requirement that began Oct. 1 includes all cargo bound for narrowbody planes - aircraft with a single aisle in the passenger seating area, including 757s, 737s and A320s - taking off from U.S. airports, including domestic and international flights.

The requirement was not part of the mandate set by Congress but Transportation Security Administration officials told airlines and freight forwarders this year it is an important interim step toward the first legal hurdle - screening 50 percent of all shipments on passenger aircraft by next Feb. 1.

Industry executives fear widespread delays when the broader mandates take effect in February, but officials reported few if any problems in meeting the initial step this month.

"So far, we haven't really seen an impact, and haven't heard of any widespread delays," said Brandon Fried, executive director of the **Airforwarders Association**.

Officials said [Southwest Airlines](#), a significant operator in the domestic air cargo market, had already implemented its shipment screening systems across its wide network and that other airlines either had shipment screening in place or had it coming.

"We felt very poised and ready," said Shelly McClay, cargo marketing manager at Dallas-based Southwest.

Southwest told cargo customers in a letter that it may have to adjust some of its cutoff times, now between 30 minutes and one hour before flight departure, because of the requirement.

The requirement also hits international carriers using narrowbody planes from U.S. airports, including the many flights serving Canada and Mexico as well as the handful of smaller aircraft used on some trans-Atlantic routes.

"We've been gearing up for this for a long time," said Gerald Simpson, vice president of cargo marketing at Air Canada. "We're ready to go for it."

Air Canada, like several carriers, added a few cents to its security surcharge to cover the cost of the new screening requirement.

For the TSA, barring unscreened cargo from narrowbody planes probably is the easiest part of erecting a new cargo security apparatus under tougher new directives from Congress.

Industry executives estimate only about one-quarter of domestic air cargo by weight moves on narrowbody planes, and those shipments are bulk-loaded like passenger bags.

The deadline Feb. 1, a step toward screening all air cargo shipments leaving U.S. airports by August 2010, will have to include bellyhold freight on widebody passenger planes, a far tougher proposition. That is because freight on the larger aircraft, including 747s, 777s and A340s, generally is packed in containers or shrink-wrapped on pallets, putting the larger industrial consignments under full screening mandates.

The law specifies that consolidated shipments must be screened by piece, so that screeners will have to break down pallets to screen each box. A pallet of 200 mp3 players, for instance, is 200 separate shipments for screening purposes, according to TSA.

Because of the volume of cargo, industry and government officials fear enormous backups when airlines are required to screen the larger industrial shipments.

The TSA's solution has been to create its Certified Cargo Screening Program that allows forwarders with the proper equipment and credentials to screen shipments before they are sent to carriers. Officials familiar with the program say some forwarders have invested in the equipment but the TSA would not release the names of those operators.

Forwarders that qualify can have stations designated Certified Cargo Screening Facilities and could even sell screening services to other operators.

Forwarders say the equipment would cost more than \$100,000 per facility, a daunting price tag for many small operators. Although the **Airforwarders Association** says its members will have to go along with the security program, some forwarders have formed a separate group to ask Congress to reconsider the regulation or to have TSA pay for the new screening equipment.

Washington political insiders considered that unlikely even before the expensive bailout of financial markets this month.

In the meantime, several airlines are upgrading their security operations to prepare for the tighter screening requirement.

Lufthansa Cargo last month said it would become the first major international airline to deploy trace explosive detection detectors at its U.S. stations. The carrier is buying 19 IONSCAN 500DT detectors for its 18 stations.

The airline also designated Chicago and Los Angeles as "security hubs" for its U.S. operations.