



# GAO Says TSA Cargo Check Plan May Fall Short

Tue, 17 Mar '09

## Lack Of Equipment, Inspectors May Prevent Full Screening By Deadline

An ambitious plan by the Transportation Security Administration to screen all 7.6 billion pounds of cargo transported annually on passenger airliners may come up short, according to a Government Accountability Office study.



USA Today reports the GAO found -- not all that surprisingly -- that TSA may not have enough equipment or personnel on hand to meet the August 2010 Congressional deadline to screen all cargo transported in the bellies of airliners for explosives.

The TSA and cargo groups "face a number of challenges in meeting the screening mandate," reads the report, to be presented at a House subcommittee hearing Wednesday.

All passenger luggage has been screened for explosives since 2002... but air cargo has largely slipped through the cracks, due to the lack of suitable equipment and sufficient manpower to screen all manner of airborne cargo.

The TSA's plan calls for the burden for most cargo screening to fall on the individual shippers themselves, with federal inspectors overseeing the process. So far, it appears the TSA will fall well short of the required number of inspectors for the August 2010 deadline; TSA spokesman Greg Soule says the Department of Homeland Security "is committed to staffing the most effective inspector workforce possible."

A bigger problem -- literally -- lies in the lack of equipment needed to scan the large cargo containers used in the belly holds of widebody airliners.



Packages loaded onto smaller narrowbody planes (anything from perishable flowers and food items, cancelled bank checks and Federal Reserve notes, computers, auto parts... the

list goes on) can be screened by equipment similar to scanners used for luggage... but the equipment doesn't exist that can screen a package longer than 10 feet, or numerous smaller items loaded into a single large cargo container destined for the cargo hold of a 747 or A330.

As it stands now, packages loaded into such large containers will need to be removed, screened individually, then repacked... creating a monstrous bottleneck in the process, according to Brandon Fried, executive director of the Airforwarders Association.