

MONDAY FOCUS: TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Air cargo to get closer look

All goods shipped by plane must be screened starting in August 2010

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Passenger airlines and freight shippers will be hard-pressed to meet a deadline requiring all air cargo to be screened for security by mid-2010, industry officials say.

About half of the electronics, fish, flowers and other goods riding on U.S. passenger carriers is inspected by airlines or freight handlers, the minimum under a rule that went into effect last month. By August 2010, all of the 10,000 tons of freight carried daily by airliners must be inspected.

The industry-run program remains a security hole even as government screening of passengers has been beefed up after the terrorist attacks in September 2001, said Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.), who introduced legislation requiring cargo inspections in 2003.

"Screening 100 percent of cargo on passenger planes has never been a matter of technology, but a matter of will," Markey said in an e-mail. "The loophole that enabled cargo to be loaded on passenger planes without first being screened was a major security gap."

Markey said he will vigorously oppose any attempt to water down the mandate.

The state of air-cargo security was the subject of a hearing last week by the House transportation security subcommittee.

"The logic is clear: If we screen passengers and their checked baggage, we must screen the other cargo onboard the same aircraft," subcommittee Chairwoman [Sheila Jackson-Lee](#) (D-Texas) said at the hearing.

The industry has been gearing up to take on the new mandate to inspect all cargo.

"We believe it can be attained, but it is going to require a lot of work," said John Meenan, executive vice president of the Air Transport Association, a Washington-based association that is made up of both passenger and cargo airlines, including the nation's two largest carriers.

Betsy Talton, a spokeswoman for Atlanta-based [Delta Air Lines](#), declined to comment beyond the association's remarks.

[American Airlines](#) is "very confident it's going to happen," Mark Najarian, vice president of cargo operations, said. "We're going to have to do a lot of work to get to 100 percent. But the 100 percent screening requirement is a requirement of the cargo industry."

Among passengers flying from U.S. airports, 85 percent are on flights where all of the cargo has been fully screened, said Edward Kelly, federal Transportation Security Administration's general manager of air cargo. The TSA does not expect to meet the 100 percent inspection requirement by the deadline for cargo on international flights entering [the U.S.](#), he said.

"To get to 100 percent is a pretty dramatic step and a very difficult one at the speed at which TSA is currently moving," said Peter Kant, an executive vice president for OSI Systems Inc.'s Rapiscan unit, which makes aviation-inspection equipment.

Other companies that make security equipment include [General Electric Co.](#), L-3 Communications Holdings Inc. and Smiths Group PLC, the world's biggest maker of airport scanners.

The parcels and packages now being checked are the low-hanging fruit compared with the challenges of inspecting cargo transported on pallets on larger planes, said Brandon Fried, executive director of the Washington-based Airforwarders Association, whose members arrange air cargo shipments.

Proponents of easing the mandate to check all freight say equipment to scan pallets carrying different kinds of goods isn't available yet and that disassembling shipments for inspection would be expensive and time-consuming.

While the price tag is impossible to calculate, the new mandate will be costly for the air-cargo industry, according to the Safe Commerce Coalition, a Washington-based cargo-industry group.

"Just to get to 50 percent, many of the carriers and freight forwarders had to increase their staffs, change processes and buy new equipment," said coalition Chairman [Asa Hutchinson](#), a former homeland security undersecretary and Republican representative from [Arkansas](#). "To get to 100 percent, you've got to double that, if not increase it even

more. Who's going to pay for that? It's obviously going to be passed on to the consumer eventually."

American, a unit of Ft. Worth-based [AMR Corp.](#), announced last month it had met the 50 percent rule, costing the carrier more than \$3 million for equipment and training.

The mandate doesn't apply to cargo planes flown by Memphis-based [FedEx Corp.](#) or Atlanta-based [United Parcel Service Inc.](#), the two largest U.S. air-freight carriers. The companies both tender some freight to passenger airlines that will have to be inspected.