



## **U.S. Government Challenges Itself on Cargo Screening**

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First it was the industry voicing objections, now US lawmakers are raising concerns about the US government's Transportation Security Administration's ability to meet its own deadlines for screening air cargo carried on passenger aircraft.

Sheila Jackson-Lee, chair of the House Homeland Security Committee subcommittee that oversees transportation security, said this week that the committee is concerned about the status of a pilot program to screen packages, the development of technology, and the number of TSA personnel that will be required to supervise cargo screening.

Jackson-Lee noted that the law requires that 50 per cent of passenger air cargo will be screened by February 2009, with 100 per cent screening by August 2010.

However, the US's Government Accountability Office says there will be loopholes in the TSA plan. In particular, that TSA has no plans to screen international air cargo inbound to the US on foreign carriers.

The GAO also says TSA plans to continue to exempt some types of domestic and outbound cargo from screening. TSA has not completed its air cargo vulnerability assessments and doesn't yet have a timetable for doing so, GAO says.

Another major problem is that the government is not funding the program and many US forwarders are expected to opt out of the Certified Cargo Screening Program (CCSP) because of the high cost of purchasing screening machinery.

"We are extremely concerned about the lack of government funding for the 100 per cent screening mandate," said Brandon Fried, executive director of the Air Forwarders Association. "Congress stated that homeland security is a federal government priority. "Certainly aviation security is included on that list of responsibilities. If it is a government mandate, for a government responsibility to secure our planes, why then is it not the government's money that provides for that security?"

The potential impact of opting out would be "dire" for forwarders and the economy. Non-participants could face significant delays for screening at the airport and could go out of business, he said.

Airports don't have the real estate to screen all cargo and airlines don't have the financial resources or personnel to expedite screening 'just in time' cargo at the airport. The result,

said Fried, could be delays of up to 48 hours in transporting cargo. This would cause additional security concerns and could jeopardise the integrity of perishables, such as medical supplies and fresh foods.

An estimated 12 million pounds of cargo daily is carried on US domestic passenger services. - Jack Handley