

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Prior to airing our piece we had several discussions with Brandon Fried about the role of air freight forwarders in the air cargo process, and the kinds of security measures currently in place, including the Known Shipper program. We also reached out, independently, to various freight forwarders and their international partners in the countries where we were conducting our tests, to better understand what security measures TSA and U.S. airlines were requiring to safeguard air cargo originating outside the U.S., and were told, among other things, that all air cargo on passenger planes had to be sent through a Known Shipper. Lastly, we spoke to aviation security experts and regulatory officials (including customs agents) in the countries where we conducted our tests about their collaboration with the U.S. government on air cargo security procedures, and were told that the Known Shipper, or trusted shipper status, was considered a guarantee of sorts that a package may not need additional scrutiny.

We interviewed Robert Jamison, second in command at the TSA, precisely because the TSA does have oversight over air cargo on international passenger flights involving US carriers -- carriers and flights we chose specifically because of the TSA's work to insure the same rigorous procedures are in place in countries like England and France when it comes to Known Shippers, or Regulated Agents as they're known in the UK, because of the considerable air traffic between the U.S. and those countries. In discussing various vulnerabilities, we were told that it would not be possible to just walk in to a freight forwarding company in London, select a U.S. flight, and send a package on that flight if we were not a Regulated Agent—something we found we could do.

We have since spoken with Mr. Fried and discussed our methodology and reporting, which we believe exposed vulnerabilities in the greater air cargo transportation network. We understand and acknowledge that there is a “multi-layered” approach to security applied both here and in the countries we chose for our test. Beyond the bomb-sniffing dogs and Explosive Detection Systems (EDS) mentioned in our story there are what Jamison called “multiple inspections techniques” that he believes would have provided a high-quality level of inspection without opening our packages or damaging the high-speed sensitive film contained inside. However, we also understand that these measures are applied to only a fraction of air cargo packages, and that there remain explosive devices that may not be detected by these additional measures.

We think it is important to note that Mr. Jamison stressed during our interview he was “not concerned” that only one of our six packages showed any sign of being opened. “I’m confident,” he said, “in the [security] regime that we have in place. And we need to continue to work with our international partners, and keep adding layers and multiple layers of security.”

For more information about the Airforwarders Association and air cargo security, go to www.airforwarders.org.