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Privacy concerns addressed, full body scanners ready for widespread deployment says L.A. Business Travel Assn.

Technology upgrade needed to protect air travelers

LOS ANGELES – January 5, 2010 -- The security scanning industry has adequately addressed concerns about privacy and individual modesty by introducing new software to ensure passenger anonymity, the Los Angeles Business Travel Association (LABTA) said today in calling for widespread use of full body scanning technology at airports throughout the world.

“Conventional metal detectors cannot assure travelers that dangerous substances such as chemical explosives are kept off commercial airliners,” said LABTA President Therese Jacobson. “Full-body scanning equipment, on the other hand, can detect non-metal weapons concealed by terrorists on their bodies or in undergarments and will greatly increase the margin of security for air travelers.”

Unfortunately, Jacobson said, deployment of the technology has been slowed by concerns it subjects passengers to a virtual strip search or is unsafe because it exposes travelers to dangerous amounts of radiation in the screening process.

“Our research convinces us both of these concerns are unfounded.” She said LABTA was pleased to learn that the latest software from scanner manufacturers creates an avatar image substituting a generic chalk outline for the person being scanned or obscures the body image to make everyone look like “Casper the Friendly Ghost” while still showing the exact placement of any threat object hidden on the body.

Moreover, in testing the full body scanners at 19 U.S. airports, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has employed procedures to further protect the anonymity of travelers. This has been done by limiting the number of security officers who see the images, separating the officers looking at the images from the passengers being screened and not storing the images after travelers have completed the screening process.

Jacobson said the latest full body scanner technology exposes people to no more radiation than is experienced in daily life and less than a passenger receives on a typical flight. A dental x-ray, by contrast, is 20,000 times stronger.

Widespread use of full body scanners likely will speed the security process by eliminating the need to empty one's pockets, she said. "The technology has been perfected and privacy concerns have been resolved. It is now time for widespread implementation of full body scanners without further delay to take aviation safety and security to the next level."

About LABTA: The Los Angeles Business Travel Association (LABTA) is the largest chapter of the National Business Travel Association (NBTA), the world's premier business travel and corporate meetings organization. LABTA represents more than 250 business travel professions including corporate and government travel, meetings managers, and travel service providers in five counties in Southern California. They collectively manage and direct millions of dollars of global business travel and meetings expenditures annually on behalf of thousands of business travelers within their organizations. For more information, visit www.labta.org

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