

Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations



Talking Points: Threat Intelligence

(Pre-flight and Airborne Security Alerts)

Background: Under current TSA policy, threat intelligence information, relevant Information Circulars (ICs), and operational Security Directives (SDs) are provided directly to all commercial airline (passenger and cargo) corporate security managers. TSA contends it is the responsibility of the airline managers to determine both the content and method by which crewmembers will be informed of threat information prior to departure. In plain language, there is no requirement for aircrew members to receive timely or meaningful information—for now, only the airline operators are notified.

In practice, ever since 9/11, most airline corporate security managers continue to demonstrate a reluctance to pass critical threat information to crewmembers, and sometimes simply do not. This is a dated issue highlighted again in December 2001 (AAL Flight #63, Richard Reid a.k.a. the “Shoe Bomber”), when government regulatory agencies failed to ensure that airline crews were notified of current critical Security Information Circulars (ICs). It is paramount that all crewmembers be alerted to all “threat intelligence”, the information is not consistently available. (American Airlines is the only airline in the entire country which have established a secure distribution process for these critical documents).

The Captain, by federal regulation, is the “in-flight security coordinator” (ISC) and is directly responsible for the safety and security of his/her flight. *The TSA’s own regulatory requirements mandate that the ISC be knowledgeable of worldwide threats and security trends, yet they are not equipping the ISCs with the necessary resources.* As stated previously, Richard Reid is a perfect case-in-point. Threat intelligence at the time warned that terrorists might try to plant explosives in shoes, but this was not distributed to crew members and a potentially disastrous situation unfolded aboard American Airlines Flight 63, as Reid attempted to detonate the bombs in his shoes. We were only lucky that another wide-body aircraft was not lost over the Atlantic Ocean. With the proper dissemination of threat intelligence, this entire situation could have been avoided.

Few airlines share crucial threat updates with their Captains. CAPA has consistently called upon the Regulators to mandate that critical transportation-focused intelligence be shared with airline crewmembers, who clearly have a “need to know”. Security Directives and Informational Circulars, which are published to specifically alert stakeholders of important threat information, are still rarely disseminated to the In-Flight Security Coordinators.

Primary Considerations:

- TSA designates the Pilot-in-Command as the In-flight Security Coordinator and mandates that they be knowledgeable about worldwide threats.
- 49 CFR 15 and 1520 clearly states that crewmembers have a “need to know” and are authorized to view sensitive material.
- The air carriers are not responsibly disseminating information to the end users.

CAPA Recommendations/Solutions: TSA must direct the regulated parties to not allow the flow of information to stop at the corporate level. It is the crewmembers themselves who are out “in the field” and must be able to make critical decisions in real time. Not equipping the crewmembers with the best information possible is no longer acceptable.

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