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TSA Roundup

Posted By [Ryan Young](#) On November 23, 2010 @ 4:26 pm In [Nanny State](#), [Personal Liberty](#), [Precaution & Risk](#), [Regulation](#), [Tech & Telecom](#) | [2 Comments](#)

The Thanksgiving travel rush is officially underway. Airports are clogged with passengers. Many of them are upset at new TSA screening policies. A new poll finds 60 percent support for full-body scanning, and just under 50 percent support for pat-downs that involve touching breasts, buttocks, and genitals.

If that sounds high, remember that most Americans don't fly. [Jim Harper](#) ^[1] also points out that the poll's wording is biased. "Before being asked about strip-search machines, poll-takers hear cognates of "terror" three times, "privacy" once." Wording like that skews the results in the TSA's favor.

Unsurprisingly, [many TSA employees don't care for the new pat-down policy either](#) ^[2]. Near-constant verbal abuse and poor passenger hygiene are among their biggest complaints. There is also the matter of having to "feel inside the flab rolls of obese passengers."

Assuming that most TSA screeners are not sex perverts, it can't be much fun spending 8-hour shifts inspecting other peoples' genitals. However, not all TSA employees are mentally sound. [A TSA employee kidnapped a woman from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and assaulted her](#) ^[3].

This was the action of a disturbed individual, and probably unrelated to the backlash against the TSA's new policies. Even so, that means the TSA has done more harm than good; TSA has yet to catch a single terrorist during its entire existence.

One reason is that its screeners are ineffective. [Adam Savage from the television show Mythbusters accidentally arrived at airport security with two 12-inch razor blades. The TSA did not find them, despite giving him a full-body scan.](#) ^[4]

Ars Technica posts a [video](#) ^[4] of Savage telling his story, and points out that "If the TSA thinks you can hijack a plane with saline solution and nail clippers, Savage's 12" razor blades are the equivalent of a nuclear bomb. Since the blades weren't anywhere near Savage's privates, they likely would have been missed by the pat-down as well."

At least one argument against full-body scanners does not hold ground: that the radiation dose from repeated scans can cause cancer and other illnesses. The dose of so small, that the odds of dying from the radiation exposure is roughly the same as dying in a terrorist attack. Those odds are less than 1 in 10,000,000. Passengers are over 20 times more likely to be struck by lightning.

As with any government agency, the TSA is highly politicized. [The two companies that make the scanners have ramped up their lobbying efforts](#) ^[5] in recent years, getting political heavyweights such as Linda Daschle (the lobbyist wife of former Sen. Tom Daschle) and Michael Chertoff to promote the scanners on Capitol Hill.

One privacy concern about full-body scans is that the images could be stored and possibly leaked on the Internet. This has already happened at a courthouse in Florida (you can see 100 of the 35,000 leaked images [here](#) ^[6]). But the TSA says [that won't be a problem with their scanners](#) ^[7]. Common sense says otherwise.

Their machines are unable to store images, yes. But any enterprising screener can modify them. Or he could even snap a picture of a naked image with his cell phone. Fortunately, a recent story about a [Denver TSA screener who was caught masturbating is a hoax](#) ^[8]. But the very fact that it is plausible should give TSA boosters pause.

In fact, flying at 30,000 feet exposes passengers to "3 mrem of radiation, an amount that is [150 times greater than the scanner gives you before you board the same flight](#) ^[9]."

That's about the strongest argument in favor of the scanners. But it is outweighed by the fact that

they induce some people to drive instead of fly. [Since driving is more dangerous than flying, the scanners are expected, on net, to kill people](#) ^[10].

They are not expected to actually save any lives, as security expert [Bruce Schneier](#) ^[11] makes crystal clear.

It is well past time to abolish the TSA. Let airlines and airports determine their own policies. Let them compete on safety; if people think flying is dangerous, they won't fly. Airlines have everything to lose. The TSA has no such incentive. If anything, its repeated failures are rewarded with budget increases.

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URLs in this post:

[1] Jim Harper: <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/washington-post-abc-news-push-poll-on-strip-search-machines/>

[2] many TSA employees don't care for the new pat-down policy either: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1332307/Now-abused-TSA-staff-vent-anger-security-patdown-searches.html>

[3] A TSA employee kidnapped a woman from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and assaulted her: http://lagrangenews.com/view/full_story/10413596/article-BREAKING-NEWS--TSA-employee-accused-of-kidnap--assault?instance=secondary_news_left_column

[4] Adam Savage from the television show *Mythbusters* accidentally arrived at airport security with two 12-inch razor blades. The TSA did not find them, despite giving him a full-body scan.:

<http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2010/11/adam-savage-tsa-saw-my-junk-missed-12-razor-blades.ars>

[5] The two companies that make the scanners have ramped up their lobbying efforts: http://http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-11-22-scanner-lobby_N.htm

[6] here: <http://http://gizmodo.com/5690749/these-are-the-first-100-leaked-body-scans>

[7] that won't be a problem with their scanners: <http://gizmodo.com/5696371/exclusive-tsa-says-body-scanners-saving-images-impossible?skyline=true&s=i>

[8] Denver TSA screener who was caught masturbating is a hoax: <http://www.dailysquib.co.uk/?c=124&a=2389>

[9] 150 times greater than the scanner gives you before you board the same flight:

<http://www.forbes.com/2010/11/23/tsa-body-scanners-radiation-opinions-contributors-marc-siegel.html>

[10] Since driving is more dangerous than flying, the scanners are expected, on net, to kill people: <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/130243-analyst-new-tsa-procedures-will-kill-more-americans-on-the-highway>

[11] Bruce Schneier: <http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/military/news/tsa-scans-security-theater-interview>

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