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**Travelers face extra scrutiny at airports; U.S. criticized for profiling program**

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An expanded profiling system to prescreen airline passengers will be applied equally to every traveler, federal officials vowed Monday, but the announcement provoked renewed criticism from security experts and civil libertarians that the approach will not help catch terrorists.

The Transportation Security Administration said that starting this summer it will phase in a more sophisticated version of a passenger-profiling program that the airlines began in 1997. But the airlines are refusing to hand over requested passenger data, citing privacy concerns.

The overhauled system, which will tap into government and commercial databases, is designed to do a better job of keeping potentially dangerous people off airplanes, identifying people who warrant extra scrutiny at the airport and reducing the hassle for the vast majority of travelers who pose no threat.

The existing system frequently has not worked out that way, resulting in some groups of passengers being overselected for screening. Senior citizens have faced extra screening because they more often pay by cash or check, and foreign-born U.S. citizens have received greater scrutiny because their names may be similar to those of suspected terrorists. The system also failed to alert authorities to some of the terrorists who hijacked and crashed four airliners on Sept. 11, 2001.

The revised program, Computer-Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening II, is supposed to close those gaps. Testing is set to begin this winter using passenger reservations data.

"The [prescreening] process applies absolute equality to everybody who buys a ticket," said Mark Hatfield, a spokesman for the security agency.

But some security experts warn that the agency is compromising the program in response to complaints from people who say they have been singled out.

"It's not an equal-opportunity program. If it is, it's worthless," said Billie Vincent, a former security chief at the Federal Aviation Administration. "The 9/11 hijackers were Saudis and other Middle Easterners. You want to look at the features of people who you are concerned about."

**Richard Sobel**, who studies privacy issues at Harvard Medical School, said the profiling program is unconstitutional and unworkable. "The government should not be setting up a program to determine who has authorization to travel in a free country," Sobel said.

The American Civil Liberties Union, meanwhile, blasted the government's decision to move forward with the program.

"Instead of zeroing in on suspects based on real evidence of wrongdoing, it sweeps every airline passenger through a dragnet," said Barry Steinhardt, a director of the group.

In addition, the airlines are balking at supplying the passenger information. .

"The U.S. airlines support the prescreening of passengers to determine security risk, but we encourage the federal government to focus their search on law-enforcement databases," said Doug Wills, spokesman for the Air Transport Association. "I don't understand how somebody's Visa statement would help determine if he or she is a terrorist risk."

Hatfield said the passenger data is needed to begin testing, adding that he expects an agreement will be reached with the airlines rather than the government having to issue a security directive. He said the security agency will move ahead developing the program in the interim by using passenger data supplied by European airlines.

The existing prescreening system requires the airlines to provide each passenger's name, home address and phone number to verify the identity of the person buying the ticket.

The revised program adds date of birth. The information is then run through commercial databases, government watch lists of suspected terrorists and law-enforcement databases.

Based on the risk assessment, passengers arriving at the airport would face one of three scenarios: a normal screening of the passenger and checked luggage and carry-ons; a more enhanced inspection that could include questioning; or a denial to board the aircraft and the passenger being detained.

The agency said it also will develop a voluntary "registered traveler" program that eliminates secondary screening at airports for people who are enrolled. Participants will be required to fill out an application containing personal information, and they will be issued a registered traveler ID card that contains biometric information such as fingerprints.

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