



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 11, 2013

TSA Is a “Complete Joke,” Says Former Airport Screener

“Anyone boarding an aircraft should feel maybe only a teeny tiny bit safer than if there were no TSA at all.”

The author of those words should know: He (or she) used to be a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screener at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, New Jersey. An article by this anonymous former screener in the [New York Post](#) paints a devastating portrait of an agency that employs incompetents, enforces arbitrary regulations, and engages in what security expert Bruce Schneier calls “security theater”: public actions taken in the name of security that actually do nothing to make people safer.



Government officials often call TSA screeners “a first-class line of defense in the war on terror,” observes the author. In fact, the author points out, one needn’t even have a high school diploma or GED to get a job as a screener. “These are the employees who could never keep a job in the private sector. I wouldn’t trust them to walk my dog.”

Most screeners aren’t really concerned with airport security, the author says. They are there for the paycheck — \$15 an hour to start, plus “tons of overtime” filling in for no-shows — and the benefits, including generous amounts of vacation and sick time and a near impossibility of being fired unless they get caught stealing from passengers. Supervisors, it seems, care little about what screeners do — as long as they don’t chew gum on duty.

Another benefit (for male screeners): “a lot of ogling of female passengers.” The author advises women to “cover up when you get to the airport. These guys are checking you out constantly.” Of course, covering up won’t do you much good when you go through the scanners that show your naked body to the screeners anyway.

The former screener states that there are a few “delusional zealots who believe they’re keeping America safe by taking your snow globe, your 2-inch pocket knife, your 4-ounce bottle of shampoo and performing invasive pat-downs on your kids.” The rest “know their job is a complete joke.” The rules are arbitrary, he argues, and the pat-downs are “ridiculous.” “As invasive as it is, you still can’t find anything using the back of your hand on certain areas.” Some screeners, embarrassed to be patting down children or wheelchair-bound seniors, just give them a quick once-over to make it look like they’re doing something; otherwise, the entire terminal would have to be shut down until the individual who wasn’t groped was located.

Then there are the stories of TSA screeners’ [strip searching grandmas](#), examining (and sometimes [breaking](#)) passengers’ urostomy and colostomy bags, and [exposing the breasts of teenage girls](#), just to name a few outrages. Whenever one of these incidents occurs, the TSA’s first defense is usually to claim



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that proper procedures were followed; later, when the affront to human decency becomes so obvious it cannot be denied, the agency blames the screeners for not following procedures. This is nonsense, writes the ex-screener: "Every time you read about a TSA horror story, it's usually about a screener doing what he or she is instructed to do."

For example:

Our first question to anyone in a wheelchair is to ask if they're able to stand for a pat-down. If someone is in a wheelchair, he likely can't stand. Even when they're sitting, we're required to ask them to move so we can check under their buttocks.

All I needed was for a passenger to fall over because I asked them to stand. And if that did happen, the screener would be vilified and the official p.r. spin would be that he needed "additional training."

As low-quality as many of the screeners are, they are just cogs in a system in which, the author maintains, "common sense has no place." They are required to enforce the rules invented by Washington bureaucrats, no matter how ridiculous they may seem and how inappropriate — not to mention unconstitutional — their enforcement may be. No wonder the agency is forced to settle for people who couldn't even get a job flipping burgers; anyone with enough intelligence to do that relatively simple task would soon go nuts trying to make sense of what the TSA asked him to do. Indeed, notes the author, when the TSA does make good hires, these people "just don't last because they can get a normal job."

As bad as all of this is, it might be worth enduring if it actually made air travel safer. Unfortunately, it doesn't. It merely gives the *appearance* of safety. Prohibited items — and probably prohibited people — get by the TSA all the time. In February, to pick one such instance, "an undercover TSA inspector with an improvised explosive device stuffed in his pants got past two security screenings at Newark Airport — including a pat-down — and was cleared to get on board a commercial flight," the [Post](#) reported. Newark, by the way, was the origin of United Airlines Flight 93, one of the planes hijacked on 9/11.

The former TSA screener doesn't believe the agency's actions improve airport security, either: "We always said it's not a question of if terrorists get through — it's a question of when. Our feeling is nothing's happened because they haven't wanted it to happen. We're not any big deterrent. It's all for show."

If something does happen, one can be reasonably sure that it won't convince the politicians in Washington to abolish the TSA; on the contrary, they will probably expand its powers. After all, on 9/11 all airport security in the country had followed the standard operating procedures dictated by Washington, and Washington's response was to create the TSA. And after every near miss since then — the "shoe bomber," the "underwear bomber" — the government has further restricted individuals' freedoms and widened the TSA's authority. It's not much of an exaggeration to suggest that we're just one incident away from having to fly naked.

Before something happens, it might be a good idea for every congressman and senator to peruse the ex-screener's article and then consider whether the cost in taxes and liberty is worth it just to give their constituents a false sense of security.

Photo of TSA uniform showing bade: AP Images



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