

Q & A re body scanners: 26th January 2010

PRACTICALITIES

Q. HOW DO BODY SCANNERS WORK?

A. There are two main types of body scanner commercially available capable of detecting body-worn threat items. They use either backscatter X-ray or active millimetre wave technologies. They are capable of producing a grey image of the human body and any objects concealed on it. Other technologies could be considered for use in the future.

Q. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PASSENGER?

A. Passengers may be required to be screened by a body scanner. This in parallel with other measures will result in an increased level of screening.

Q. ARE BODY SCANNERS EFFECTIVE IN SCREENING FOR HIDDEN THREAT ITEMS?

A. No technology can be 100% effective, but it is clear that body scanners help to detect devices such as the one used at Detroit. It therefore makes sense that they be deployed as swiftly as possible to add to the capabilities we already have for detecting possible threat items.

Q. CAN PASSENGERS CHOOSE TO BE SCREENED BY AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD?

A. If selected for body scanning, you will not be offered an alternative method of screening. Refusal to be screened will result in you not being allowed to travel. We appreciate that this may appear harsh, but it is necessary in order to maintain security levels. When passengers book an airline ticket, they do agree to be subjected to the security measures in force for their own protection.

Q. WHY DO PASSENGERS HAVE TO BE SCANNED?

A. We have a number of security screening methods in place. Body scanners are an additional layer of security that offers an effective method of screening passengers for emerging threats.

Q. HOW MANY SCANNERS WILL BE DEPLOYED?

A. This is an operational decision to be taken by individual airports.

Q. HOW WILL YOU DEAL WITH THE NEXT THREAT?

A. Body scanners are deployed as just one aspect of a security process which addresses both previously realised and future threats.

Q. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE SCANNED?

A. Passengers should not be concerned. Body scanners offer a far less intrusive process than a hand search as there is no physical contact needed during the scanning process. The vast majority of people that have been screened by body scanners in previous deployments have been content with the process. Passengers selected will be asked to take up a particular stance depending on the type of body scanner. They will not notice any effect at all.

Q. WILL THE SCREENING BE THE SAME TRAVELLING FROM OTHER AIRPORTS AROUND THE WORLD?

A. Not all locations will deploy body scanners. There will be a number of alternative approaches to provide the required level of security.

Q. WHEN WILL AIRPORT X RECEIVE THESE SCANNERS?

A. Body scanners will be rolled out nationally over a period of time.

Q. WHAT MAKE OF SCANNER WILL BE USED WHERE?

A. This is an operational decision for individual airport authorities.

Q. I HAVE AN IDEA OF HOW TO DECEIVE THE BODY SCANNER, CAN I ALERT SOMEONE TO THIS?

This is not specific to body scanners. We welcome feedback about our security arrangements. This can be done via the DfT web site

Q. I HAVE SOME TECHNOLOGY THAT WORKS MUCH BETTER THAN A BODY SCANNER, WILL YOU BUY IT?

The DfT does not buy equipment for airports. Manufacturers should approach airports direct for sales of equipment.

Some equipment for use in aviation security requires approval from the regulator before use by an airport. Specific information can be obtained by contacting DfT via the DfT website.

Q. WILL SCANNERS BE USED AT STAFF CHECKPOINTS AS WELL?

No, there are no plans to deploy body scanners at staff search facilities at the moment

PASSENGER CONCERNS

Q. WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY CONCERNS?

A. Extensive safeguards have been developed to ensure passengers' privacy is respected. Images are viewed remotely from the machine, and are deleted immediately after analysis. Images can't be recovered at a later date from the machines.

An interim code of practice has been produced following discussions with industry and OGDs for the initial deployment of body scanners. It is available via the DfT website. It will ensure that the implementation and application of body scanners will be proportionate to privacy rights.

The Department will be launching a full public consultation shortly on the interim code of practice and will consider all representations carefully before preparing a final code of practice later in the year..

Q. WILL YOU BE ABLE TO RECOGNISE AN INDIVIDUAL FROM THEIR IMAGE?

A. No. The image produced does not show any distinguishing features such as hair or skin tone and it is not possible to recognise people from their facial features. This allows the screener to focus on concealed items.

Q. WHO WILL SEE THE IMAGES?

A. Only security vetted and trained security staff employed by the airport will be able to view the images. Screening staff will be situated at a location away from passengers so they will not be able to associate an image with a particular individual.

Q. CAN I VIEW THE IMAGE THAT IS PRODUCED OF ME?

A. No, it is not possible for a passenger to view the image. The equipment deployed in airports does not have the capacity to save an image in any form. Examples of images are available from a test version of the machine before deployment.

Q. WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

A. We are confident that the introduction of these scanners is a proportionate and necessary next step in enhancing security of passengers. We will be requiring children to be screened using the scanners. To do otherwise would risk undermining the effect of these new measures. All airport security staff performing passenger screening duties will already have undergone a criminal record check. The criminal record check includes checking for offences against children.

Q. WHAT IF A PASSENGER WISHES THEIR IMAGES TO VIEWED BY SOMEONE OF THE SAME GENDER ONLY? CAN THEY REFUSE TO PERMIT SOMEONE OF ANOTHER GENDER TO SEE THIS?

A. Yes they can ask for same gender screening if they wish.

Q. WILL THE SECURITY PERSONNEL HAVE CRIMINAL RECORD BACKGROUND CHECKS?

A. Yes. All airport security staff performing passenger screening duties will already have undergone a criminal record check. The criminal record check includes checking for offences against children.

HEALTH ISSUES

Q. ARE BODY SCANNERS SAFE?

A. Yes. There are a number of different body scanner technologies. The risks from any of the scanning technologies we are currently considering is negligible compared to those encountered in every day life.

The backscatter-type machines involve small doses of radiation. However, this is equivalent to the radiation you would receive from just two minutes' flying time on a transatlantic flight.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE SAFETY OF AN UNBORN CHILD?

A. The dose received from the scanner is a very small fraction of that received every day from natural sources and is far lower than the permissible levels allowed by law for all types of people including expectant mothers.

Q. WHAT ARE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF THESE SCANNERS? WHAT RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE?

A. The risks from the scanners have been assessed by many independent international bodies including the UK Health Protection Agency. Tests have concluded that the dose received from being scanned is far below the allowed levels in the UK and does not constitute any unacceptable risks to health. A report by the HPA on behalf of DfT is available via the DfT website.

Q. WHAT SCIENTIFIC TESTING HAS BEEN DONE TO PROVE THESE SCANNERS ARE SAFE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN / PREGNANT WOMEN?

A. The risks from the scanners have been quantified for all groups of passengers including young children and pregnant women. Tests have concluded that the dose received from being scanned is far below the allowed levels in the UK and does not constitute any unacceptable risks to health.

Q. WHAT ABOUT PASSENGERS WITH MEDICAL CONDITIONS SUCH AS A STOMA (COLOSTOMY): WILL THIS SHOW UP ON THE SCAN? IF SO WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

A. The scan shows only the external characteristics of the body. It does not penetrate the skin or display images of internal organs. The scan does highlight anomalies and security officers are trained to deal with issues of this nature in an appropriate manner as they already do in hand searches.

Q. WILL INDIVIDUALS WITH A PACEMAKER/ INTERNAL DEFIBRILLATORS/ AN IMPLANTABLE DEVICE BE MADE EXEMPT FROM PASSING THROUGH THE SCANNERS? IF NOT, WHAT TYPE OF RADIATION IS USED BY THE SCANNERS?

A. No. There are a number of different technologies utilising both ionising (X-ray) and non-ionising (millimetre wave) radiation. All the technologies deployed have been assessed by government health and safety regulators. The dose received from being scanned is far below the allowed levels in the UK and does not constitute an unacceptable risk to health.

Q. IS THERE IS A LIMIT PER DAY FOR STAFF USE? WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF REGULAR EXPOSURE?

A. There are no current plans to deploy body scanners at staff search facilities. In order to exceed the recommended dose limit an individual would need to be scanned over 5000 times in a 12 month period.

LEGALITY

Q. IS IT LEGAL TO SCREEN CHILDREN?

A. Yes. The use of body scanners for children is compatible with the Protection of Children Act 1978. The use of scanners will be subject to the code of practice developed by the Department, other government departments and the aviation industry

Q. CAN PASSENGERS REFUSE TO GO THROUGH THE SCANNER?

A. If you are selected for scanning, and refuse to go through, you will unfortunately not be able to travel, this is necessary in order to maintain security levels. When passengers book an airline ticket, they do agree to be subject to the security measures in force for their own protection.

Q. WHAT CRITERIA WILL BE USED TO SELECT WHICH PASSENGERS WILL BE SCANNED?

A. For security reasons we do not provide specific details of selection for additional screening however we can give assurance that passengers will not be selected based on ethnic origin, gender, age or destination of travel.

Q. WHAT IS THE EU POSITION ON BODY SCANNERS?

A. Body scanners are currently in use in a number of EU airports. We are working with EU and international partners on the development of body scanner technologies and their use.

Q. WILL PEOPLE BE ABLE TO BE EXEMPTED FROM NEEDING A SCAN ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS?

A. No. Everyone selected will be expected to undergo a body scanning process.

MANUFACTURERS/AVIATION INDUSTRY CONCERNS

Q. WHO WILL PAY FOR THE EQUIPMENT?

A. The well established principle of the user pays applies here. As with all aviation security measures the costs will continue to be met by the industry in order to maintain an acceptable level of security for the travelling public.

Q. ARE SOME BODY SCANNERS BETTER THAN OTHERS?

A. There are a number of different types of technology however all technologies deployed will offer an effective level of security. We are developing an interim Code of Practice to ensure that all technologies used provide an equal level of security.

Q. WILL ALL AIRPORTS BE DIRECTED TO DEPLOY BODY SCANNERS?

A. No, deployment of body scanning equipment will be an option available to airport operators. However we will be actively encouraging airports to invest in this technology in order for them to capitalise on the security benefits.

CONSULTATION

Q WHEN WILL THE CONSULTATION TAKE PLACE?

A As soon as if practicable.

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Q HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE?

A. you will be able to do so via the DfT website