



The TSA Report Card

A Quarterly Review of Security Screenings of Sikh Travelers in U.S. Airports

July 2008

Good News! SFO Partners with Coalition: Complaints May Soon End

Last quarter, we reported that San Francisco International Airport (SFO) was screening nearly 100% of turban-wearing Sikhs who passed through its gates. Our numbers reflect that the problem continued for a large part of Q2 as well. However, we are happy to report that from Q3 onwards, the situation will improve at SFO.

Edward Gomez, Federal Security Director at SFO met with officials from TSA headquarters and Sikh Coalition staff in July. In light of these meetings, he and his staff have pledged to ensure that individual screeners utilize the discretion provided to them by federal policy in determining whether a passenger's headwear is bulky enough to warrant secondary screening.

To help make screeners aware of turban sizes and styles, Mr. Gomez has provided additional training on top of that already mandated by headquarters. The SFO TSA team is working to educate screeners about turbans and how they are tied by asking newly employed Sikh screeners to demonstrate for their colleagues.

In coming months, Jet Airways, Kingfisher, and Air India are all beginning direct flights from SFO to South Asia. In anticipation of increased numbers of Sikh passengers on those flights, SFO's TSA team has already ensured that the airlines will inform passengers of the TSA's screening policy. Mr. Gomez has also reached out to the Sikh community to recruit more Sikh screeners for SFO by December.

"TSA/SFO is and will always be committed to providing the highest levels of security while respecting individual rights. We continue to partner with all community groups we serve to seek their input in helping us achieve our important security mission," said Mr. Gomez.

The Sikh Coalition would like to thank the entire SFO TSA team for their hard work on this issue. We would also like to thank **Congresswoman Jackie Speier**, for her support and initiative.

Screening Sikhs by the Numbers:	Q1	Q2
Sikhs who were not informed of their option to conduct a self-pat-down	22 (out of 80)	7 (out of 37)
Sikhs who were told that turban screening is a mandatory security measure	18 (out of 80)	15 (out of 37)
Screening complaints stemming from California airports	49%	35%
Sikhs sent for additional screening who reported feeling singled out *	64%	92%

*Note that this number is based on self-reporting by Sikh travelers. As a result, since more people are likely to complain about unpleasant experiences at security, this percentage is likely weighted towards bad experiences.

Emerging Problem Airports?

While the numbers are low, we have received reports from Sikh passengers who believe that Sikhs are always subject to secondary screenings at San Jose and Chicago O'Hare Airports.

More troubling, however, are reports from Seattle's Sea-Tac Airport (SEA), where the policy in practice has been reported as mandatory turban searches. When a group of seven sardars returning from a Sikh conference in May entered Seattle's security area, all seven were told to submit to what screeners told them was a required secondary screening of their turbans.

Addressing the policy implementation at SEA, which mirrors the earlier difficulties at SFO that have now been remedied, should be a priority for TSA officials in Q3.

Are you a turbaned Sikh?
 Have you flown through the Bay Area lately?
 Help us get accurate information for our report cards by telling us your screening experiences—good or bad!

If you travel through SFO or SJC in the next 3 months, we want to hear about it!

Report your experience online through our homepage, www.sikhcoalition.org, or directly in our online survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=NR_2b9q39BJ9bgnsn3UBnAGA_3d_3d.

Isolated Incidents

In addition to patterns at specific airports, some Sikh travelers reported procedural discrepancies at various airports.

1. A passenger who had been told to proceed without secondary screening by a screener at **Richmond Airport** was called back for secondary screening when a supervisor yelled to the original screener that “Hey, he has to get patted down.”
2. A passenger flying through **Evansville Airport** in Indiana was told that a screener would have to pat down his turban and that he “should expect more of these kind of checks in the future.”
3. A Sikh passenger at **San Francisco International Airport** was informed that his three options for secondary screening were (1) to take off the turban; (2) let the screener pat it and the passenger may still have to remove it; or (3) submit to further screening.

What is Secondary Screening?

Based on your complaints to us, here is a clarification of the secondary screening procedures at U.S. airports.

- 1) As you walk into the security screening line at a U.S. airport, you may be asked to remove all bulky items of clothing or you may be told that if you refuse to remove your dastar, you could be subject to additional screening.
- 2) At the front of the security line, the screener who directs you through the metal detector will decide whether he/she considers your dastar to be bulky and, therefore, to require additional security. This is the only person who should make this decision.
- 3) If the screener determines that your dastar will be subject to secondary screening, he/she will give you three options AFTER you have cleared the metal detector. The options should be (a) walk through a puffer machine if available; (b) allow the screener to pat-down your turban; or (c) pat-down your own turban and have your hands swabbed for chemicals. The screener should also ask if you'd like the secondary search to be conducted in private. Once you successfully clear secondary screening, you should proceed on to your flight without a problem. **Don't forget to tell the Sikh Coalition about your screening experiences.**

REMEMBER: ONLY the screener at the metal detector has the discretion to make this decision. No supervisor or other screener should be telling him/her to pull you aside.

REMEMBER: You can still be subject to secondary EVEN IF you successfully cleared the metal detector. The secondary screening is checking for chemicals, which would not be detectable by the metal walk-through machine.

REMEMBER: Walking through a puffer machine (an electronic trace portal) IS a form of secondary screening.

Room for Improvement

The Sikh Coalition recommends the TSA take the following steps to improve service to the Sikh community.

1. Based on complaint patterns, follow up with problem airports that seem to be interpreting the policy as mandatory turban screening.
2. Audit TSA screeners in the exercise of their discretion to ensure that individual TSA employees are not engaging in racial profiling at U.S. airports.
3. Substantively involve Sikh civil rights groups in the development of training materials for screeners.
4. Conduct outreach to the Sikh community to explain the purpose and functioning of the revised policy. Post information about the procedure in Punjabi.

Why Numbers Matter

Numbers speak louder than words.

Since the TSA's first headwear policies went into effect last August, all the changes we have been able to negotiate have been because all of you have spoken out.

And we still need your help. If you wear a dastar or other head covering, please report your experience **each time you fly**—whether you are secondarily screened or not.

Change is only possible if Sikhs like you tell us what is happening on the ground. Please report to make our work effective.

www.sikhcoalition.org