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Letters to The Editor  
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Dear Editor ,

I just read (with disgust) the article by Benedict Bahner, entitled: "Aviation safety and bioterrorism are targeted at ASME special session, as more than 800 hear from experts", that appeared in the December, 2001 ASME NEWS. I say, "with disgust", because much of what was presented as aviation security is nothing more than new and improved methods of harassing paying passengers and violating their rights and dignity. Many in the engineering world are dazzled by the "gee-wiz" security checkpoint technology, but the most intrusive, obnoxious new security measures really do nothing to prevent a future hijacking. Meanwhile, many passive, non-intrusive security measures that would really make a difference are given far less attention. Keep in mind, it does not take the imagination of Thomas Edison, or the cunning of Erwin Rommel to figure out how to get all kinds of deadly weapons (including firearms) past even the most technologically exotic security checkpoints. It can and will be done. Some in the airline industry and in the F.A.A. are banking on the illusion that these new and improved checkpoints will be impervious to security breeches and have, therefore, fought proposals allowing pilots to be armed. This recipe for disaster is being cooked up by those who feel that a pilot can be trusted with the lives of hundreds of people on an aircraft and God knows how many on the ground, yet, somehow, simply can't be trusted with a revolver loaded with snakeshot capable of killing a terrorist without penetrating a pressurized aircraft cabin.

One of the most ominous measures advocated by Susan Hallowell, of the F.A.A. is the "National Travel Card". She is quoted as saying that the card would allow for different levels of screening, depending upon who the passenger is and how often the passenger travels. Ms. Hallowell didn't use the word, but it sounds like profiling doesn't it? Profiling based upon race would raise howls of protest from the public (and rightly so), yet profiling based upon the fact that an airline doesn't like passengers who fly more often (or less often) than the recommended yearly amount, or upon the fact that the airline doesn't

care for a passenger's particular choice of destinations is somehow supposed to be acceptable? I can see it now, a passenger's ticket information would be processed through some computer program that would magically tell airport security personnel who the next hijacker will be, based upon the fact that the passenger in question often flies out of Kennedy Airport in NYC to LAX in Los Angeles and is also rumored to have an acquaintance named Omar who lives in Boston and works at a Logan Airport cafeteria, or some other such ridiculous programmed screening criteria.

The most obnoxious security measure advocated by Susan Hallowell, is the "CAT scan-like tunnel" for detecting concealed weapons. I know that some of these machines use ultraviolet light, or flashes of X-rays to see through cloth. So pretty much, our Fourth Amendment rights are not only encroached upon by the traditional metal detectors, but are now to be obliterated by a device that can see through clothing. Boy, does that have the potential for serious abuse! An attractive woman passenger walking through one of these voyeuristic tunnels would feel as if she were running the gauntlet of drunken jet pilots at a Navy Tailhook convention. So, let's see, the scanner fires up and, (Presto!) security can see right through her underwear. With the click of a mouse and the stroke of a key, an unscrupulous security man with leering eyes can create a JPEG file of this unsuspecting virtually nude woman passenger (don't *even* tell me that this can't, or won't happen). If security stops the woman and asks to see her ticket ("for security reasons, mind you.....yeah, that's it"), they will also be able to find out her full name, address and phone number to go with her picture. Just for the record Ms. Hallowell, what happens to a passenger who dares wear lead-lined, sensor-blocking underwear to the airport? Will they be arrested? Will they be strip-searched?

If you ASME members want real aviation security, use your engineering skills to develop a vault-like, bullet-proof cockpit door that isn't prohibitively heavy. For the record; nobody ever thought of having a bullet-proof bulkhead separating the cockpit from the passenger cabin with a separate exterior hatch for the pilots to use? Why not use your engineering skills to develop inverted U-shaped blast-proof airline cargo containers with blast doors that would direct the explosive force of a detonating suitcase bomb downwards, out the bottom of the aircraft fuselage and away from the passengers, fuel tanks and critical systems such as hydraulic components? How about working on new materials for light weight bullet-proof aircraft cabin windows? These ideas are not new. They are thirty years overdue. The advanced avionics that can take control of an aircraft and prevent it from being deliberately crashed was the only good idea alluded to in the article, but that, too, is not a new idea.

Obviously, money plays a big role in all of this. Security measures are not cheap. In the end, however, if airlines and the F.A.A. keep pursuing the same old obnoxious philosophy

for aviation security, they will wind up with many airliners that are grounded for want of passengers. There is evidence that this is already happening. The public's "fear of flying" is the reason often cited by the airline industry and the F.A.A. for the downturn in air travel since September 11, 2001. I don't buy it. I believe "fear of airports" is more like it. Then again, maybe airport security personnel and Susan Hallowell should be happy right now, because grounded airliners are the safest airliners of them all. Call me cynical, but I have little doubt that the airline industry and the F.A.A will continue with their obnoxious approach. There will still be National Guardsman at the airport with their non-firing parade rifles, passengers will be processed in as if they were new prisoners at Alcatraz and airliners will still be hijacked in spite of all the new "gee-wiz" security checkpoint technology. If and when another aircraft is hijacked, the passengers on it will, no doubt, be huddled in the back of the plane with their technologically improved cellphones frantically dialing 911 and asking why they still have no security even after they gave up their liberty. Undoubtedly, a new panel of so-called experts will then be formed to answer *that* question.

Sincerely,

Steve [REDACTED], ME  
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