

# Vancouver International Airport to Get Full-body Scanners

Security workers will be able to see through travellers' clothes

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Travellers at Vancouver International Airport could find themselves subject to full-body scans that see through clothing as early as next week.

The airport is expected to receive one or two of the controversial full-body imaging scanners in the next 10 days, said Don Ehrenholz, vice-president of operations and engineering at YVR.

The new technology will primarily target U.S.-bound travellers at first, said Transport Minister John Baird. These passengers must either undergo a scan or submit to a physical patdown, while passengers on domestic and international flights will continue to be randomly selected for the same type of secondary screening done now.

However, suspicious domestic or international travellers could be required to pass through the scanning machine, said Baird.

The announcement has drawn a range of criticism, from security experts who say the scanners are ineffective to civil liberties groups who call them a violation of privacy.

About a dozen of the new scanners are expected to arrive within the next week and the rest by the spring. Patrick Charette, a Transport Canada spokesman, said the scanners will be used in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

A total of 44 scanners are designated for Canada at a cost of \$11 million.

Baird made the announcement Tuesday in Ottawa, citing the botched Christmas Day bombing of a Detroit-bound flight as an incentive to ramp up security.

He believes most people will accept the new screening measures.

"I think for many Canadians, the idea of going through an electronic machine is far more comfortable and less invasive ... than an invasive physical patdown," he said at a news conference.

The Vancouver Sun reported Monday that the Vancouver Airport Authority will beef up security plans throughout January, leading up to the 2010 Winter Olympics.

March 1, the day after the closing ceremonies, is expected to be YVR's busiest day in

history, with 39,000 people and 77,000 pieces of luggage leaving the airport.

Ehrenholz said the scanners will help simplify the security process and reduce the number of airport employees needed to perform physical pat-downs.

Doug McMakin, an engineer at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Wash., helped invent and develop the body-scanning technology. He said it's an efficient and effective way to detect plastics, bandages and other substances that now go unnoticed.

"The scanners illuminate with very low-power millimetre waves, which penetrate through clothing and hair," said McMakin. "[The waves] reflect off any object that would be under the clothing and it reflects off the body as well."

He added that, unlike X-rays and radiation, the body scanners' signals are very low-power, similar to radio waves from a cellphone or satellite television.

"With millimetre waves, you don't break the DNA bonds in your body, so there's no harm."

Critics of the scanners' effectiveness include Andre Gerolymatos, a Simon Fraser University professor and expert on terrorism.

Gerolymatos suggested the body scanner is a cheap political tool to help appease public fears, but does not offer any real protection to passengers.

"Are we going to have body inspections next?" he asked. "I guarantee you, someone will go through [a body scanner] with an explosive inside a condom and inserted inside their cavity."

The introduction of the scanners is also raising concerns about modesty and human dignity, particularly among Muslims, many of whom feel unfairly targeted by the new security measures.

"This is totally unacceptable to us," said Aziz Khaki, president of the Muslim Canadian Federation in Vancouver.

Khaki said the machines represent "the greatest humiliation to Muslims, especially to our women."

But, he added, all Canadians should be concerned.

By forcing someone to be viewed naked by strangers, "you are literally degrading that person," he said.

Maya Yazigi, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of B.C., agreed the body scanners raise serious questions around privacy and civil rights.

But, she added, it's how the machines are going to be used that may prove the bigger issue.

If all Canadians, and not just Muslim Canadians, are made subject to the scanners, "there may be less of a feeling of discrimination," she said.

“It has more to do with the expectations of Canadians that we are going to be treated equally under the law.”

Deployment of the new scanning equipment was requested by the U.S., but Canada is still talking with Washington to clarify what, if any, additional security measures might be required.

Canada has not decided whether it will follow the U.S. lead and require all air travellers from 14 countries deemed to be “state sponsors of terrorism” to undergo additional screening, a Transport Canada spokesman said.

The office of the federal privacy commissioner said it is satisfied the scans won’t invade personal privacy since the images will be viewed by an officer in another area who would not be able to identify the passenger.

The scanners were tested during a six-month pilot project last year at the airport in Kelowna, and 95 per cent of passengers surveyed said they would prefer a scan over a physical search.

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