

Statement of Jill M. Segraves, CSP
Director, Occupational Safety, Health & Environment
Radiation Safety Program Manager
Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
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Good afternoon Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before the subcommittee today as you address safety standards and practices employed by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and other Federal agencies. TSA has been in the vanguard in promoting a safe and healthful working environment for all of its employees and I welcome the opportunity to discuss our worker safety programs with you. I appreciate the work the Subcommittee performs in providing proper oversight of employee safety issues for the Federal workforce.

Since its creation after 9/11, TSA has played a key role in securing our Nation's transportation systems. TSA employs a layered approach to provide security in all modes of transportation, including aviation and transit rail domains. In so doing, TSA relies first and foremost upon its workforce, which occupies the front line in protecting our homeland. In order to fulfill our vital security mission we must protect our workforce and ensure its safety.

A Commitment to Occupational Safety and Health

I am a Certified Safety Professional who has been with TSA since January 2003 and I am proud to have participated in the start-up of TSA's occupational safety and health program. In the past seven years, I have helped advance programs in all facets of employee safety and health. Today, all of our procurement specifications and engineering reviews of new screening technologies consider the safety of our employees and technology is only deployed once we have certified that it is safe. We coordinate with organizations such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and Federal Occupational Health (FOH), all three of which are within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST); and the U.S. Army Public

Health Command (Provisional) for technical reviews and independent evaluations. TSA occupational safety professionals routinely visit our Nation's airports to provide support and address safety concerns. Workforce training – to enhance both the safety of the employees and the security of the traveling public – has taken center stage in building a mature, skilled and professional workforce. In addition to formal training programs, employee outreach has expanded through the use of social media and online communications, allowing us to quickly transmit information on a variety of issues, including worker safety, to our employees, and to receive feedback from our employees through TSA's IdeaFactory, Blog Central, and National Advisory Council.

The Office of Occupational Safety, Health, and Environment (OSHE), which I lead, is TSA's major program office responsible for all safety and environmental activities, including program support and technical assistance to airports, field units, and TSA headquarters personnel on all matters related to occupational safety, health and environmental management, including hazardous materials. The OSHE Occupational Safety and Health Program develops policy and guidance and provides technical resources to assist TSA managers in implementing the following responsibilities: inspections and audits, abatement plans, incident investigations and reporting, injury and illness tracking and recordkeeping, handling employee reports of unsafe/unhealthy working conditions, responding to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) complaints. The Occupational Health Unit provides professional services for medical issues and health-related activities or events, coordinates the development of clear and consistent agency health/medical policies and guidelines, and provides health services for TSA employees located within the immediate Washington, D.C. area. The Environmental Management Program seeks to protect the natural environment affected by our transportation security activities by ensuring compliance with local, State, and Federal environmental requirements. OSHE also works with the Department of Homeland Security's Chief Medical Officer and the Office of Health Affairs, as well as the Office of Safety and Environmental Programs, to ensure the health and safety of our workforce.

An Independent Study of Radiation Exposure Conducted by NIOSH

In March 2003, we requested that an independent study be conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a division of HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to evaluate employees' exposure to radiation from TSA cabinet x-ray systems, which include the checked baggage Explosives Detection Systems (EDS) and checkpoint x-ray systems. The final NIOSH report, analyzing this study and including NIOSH's recommendations, was issued in September 2008. The airports that participated in the study were selected by the workforce itself, specifically by a group of six Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) from different airports who also provided valuable input and coordinated directly with NIOSH researchers during on site surveys.

In its study of checked and carry-on baggage screening practices at the 12 selected airports, NIOSH concluded that exposure levels are below the OSHA permissible standard. The study concluded that none of the participants' radiation doses in the evaluation exceeded the OSHA criteria above which employee monitoring would be required.

The NIOSH study found that TSOs generally are exposed to very small radiation doses: 99 percent of measured monthly doses were less than 10 mrem, and 89 percent were less than 1 mrem. (The monthly natural background radiation dose is approximately 26 mrem per month.) These monthly doses projected over a year are well below the OSHA annual permissible exposure limit of 5,000 mrem or 1,250 mrem per calendar quarter. According to OSHA, personal dosimeters are required if the dose to an employee exceeds or is likely to exceed 25% of the quarterly limit (or 312.5 mrem in a calendar quarter).

The study recommended that additional dosimetry studies be conducted for at least one year to evaluate differences observed between airports and to address the deployment of new systems.

Implementing Key Recommendations of the NIOSH Report

TSA has implemented key recommendations of the NIOSH report, including formalizing a comprehensive radiation safety program to meet OSHA and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requirements and evaluating TSO radiation exposure levels at selected airports through an additional year-long dosimetry study that commenced in April 2009.

In addition, based on the results of the study, TSA took additional steps to ensure safe working conditions for our workforce, including:

- Adding EDS safety training to baggage screening courses;
- Increasing the number of service technicians equipped with radiation survey meters;
- Improving maintenance through more stringent maintenance contracts;
- Working with EDS manufacturers to improve machine design;
- Providing annual radiation safety awareness training for all TSOs; and
- Using Safety Action Teams, Collateral Duty Safety Officers (CDSOs), and Employee Councils to improve health and safety communications between employees and management.

Consistent with the recommendations of the NIOSH study, each piece of TSA equipment that uses ionizing radiation undergoes an initial radiation survey upon installation and an annual radiation survey to ensure it stays in top working condition. In addition, radiation surveys are performed after maintenance on components that affect radiation safety and at the request of employees. This provides a continuous level of safety.

The additional dosimetry study, managed by certified health physicists from the U.S. Army Public Health Command (Provisional), is being conducted at six airports and is currently nearing

completion. Monitoring at five airports concluded in June and will conclude at the final airport in August. The personal and area dosimeters collected from the airports that completed the study are currently being evaluated.

To date, TSA has focused on airports with standalone EDS systems since employees work in close proximity to these systems and NIOSH had previously recommended a study of these x-ray systems. For the personal dosimetry portion of the study, dosimeters were issued to TSOs and worn for a designated time period prior to being removed and evaluated; 1,155 TSOs have had one or more dosimeters returned and processed. Preliminary results, based on four to ten months of data, are well below the criteria that would require TSOs to wear personal dosimeters.

For the area monitoring portion of the study, dosimeters were mounted near the entrance and exit of TSA cabinet x-ray systems for the designated time period; 159 area dosimeters were placed at the six airports. As expected, the preliminary area monitoring results are higher than the personal monitoring results because the area dosimeters remain in place for the entire monitoring period, whereas the TSOs are monitored only during their work shifts. Also, the area dosimeters are typically mounted closer to the x-ray system entrance or exit than where TSOs are positioned while working at the system. Although the area monitoring results are higher than the personal monitoring results, all of the results are well below the OSHA criteria that would require TSOs to wear personal dosimeters.

Responding to Specific Concerns at Individual Airports

Last March, in response to concerns expressed by TSA workers at Boston Logan International Airport, TSA requested that NIOSH conduct an independent health hazard evaluation (HHE) at the airport. Employees at Boston Logan had expressed concern about the reports of cancer among employees and concerns about radiation exposure from screening machines.

In correspondence dated May 17, 2010, NIOSH concluded:

“(We) believe that it is unlikely that the cancers reported are associated with exposures from the TSA baggage screening machines at Boston Logan. We found that the number of employees with cancer was not above the expected rates overall, and the specific types of cancer diagnosed among TSA employees are varied and among the most common in the general population. Moreover, while the work inherently involves being in the area where ionizing radiation from the x-ray machines is present, the doses to TSA employees are not at the levels to be a health concern. In fact, when we compare the doses to the natural background radiation we all experience in our daily lives, the doses recorded are negligible.”

Our request for an independent NIOSH investigation in Boston, along with our original request for the NIOSH study, and our swift response to recommendations from NIOSH, including a new study of dosimetry, are all illustrations of how seriously TSA takes the safety and health of its employees.

Raising the Bar by Supporting One Another

TSA not only maintains a high level of safety for our workforce, but continues to focus on innovative ways to raise this bar. We are working to create and sustain a culture of safety at TSA where employees feel a sense of responsibility for their own safety and that of their colleagues and the public. The National Advisory Council (NAC), with the support of my office, has launched "I've Got Your Back!" – a campaign to promote safety awareness. Working together, it is our goal to provide the safest work environment possible to enable TSA employees to focus on their mission of keeping the American traveling public safe.

Our safety and health initiatives, training programs, and internal and external partnerships have fostered a safer working environment for TSA employees. This is demonstrated through federal performance metrics for safety and workers' compensation programs. The total case rates for injuries and illnesses and those cases that resulted in lost work days reported by TSOs in this fiscal year are approximately 80% less than the rates reported in FY 2005. These improvements have led to workers' compensation cost savings of more than 25% over the same time period.

I have been privileged to serve as director of TSA's OSHE, and to develop a comprehensive safety and health program. TSA recognizes that its strength as an organization depends upon the safety of its workforce, and that its mission as a risk-based, intelligence-driven agency is measured not only by its protection of the traveling public but also by its commitment to protecting the safety and health of its workers. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Chaffetz, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.