Transportation Security Administration

Facts About the “Quiet Skies”

Wednesday, August 22, 2018

You’ve likely heard or read about the “Quiet Skies” program recently. Media reports have inaccurately described it as a program through which Federal Air Marshals surveil random travelers for no rhyme or reason. In fact, it’s an important program, and we’d like to give you a better understanding of it.

If your local police department had intelligence that your neighborhood was at an elevated threat for dangerous activity, you’d want an increased police presence until the threat was gone. Federal Air Marshals serve in that same capacity in the aviation environment; they are law enforcement officers who use their experience and training to identify things that are out of the ordinary in the aviation environment. Over the years, Federal Air Marshals have used their skills and training to successfully respond to in-flight emergencies and non-terrorist incidents. Their on-board presence has defused dozens of situations that had the potential to escalate, placing the aircraft, crew, and passengers in further danger.

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Targeting System, TSA’s intelligence professionals develop a set of risk-based, intelligence-driven scenario rules, which allow us to identify international travelers who may require enhanced screening. These rules have strict oversight by the Department of Homeland Security, including the privacy, civil rights and liberties, and general counsel offices.

TSA uses this program to reduce the risk on airplanes by identifying passengers deemed to be higher risk according to certain travel patterns and other intelligence-based factors. Contrary to some reporting, the program does not take into account race or religion, and does not designate individuals based on their observed behaviors onboard an aircraft. As trained law enforcement officers, Federal Air Marshals observe passengers in accordance with their training. When FAMs are informed that a traveler identified through the intelligence-driven scenario rules will be on a particular flight or in the airport, they are able to observe the traveler in the airport and on the flight. Passengers referred to the program may require additional scrutiny for a certain period of time; however, TSA routinely removes passengers from the program sooner than the prescribed period if we become aware of information that indicates the passengers do not represent a risk.

Something to keep in mind is that the **Federal Air Marshal Service** is the only federal law enforcement agency dedicated solely to protecting the nation’s aviation system. Since President Kennedy initiated the concept of having armed air marshals, the goal has always been to protect travelers and ensure that the flight arrives to its destination safely.

Let’s take a moment to recognize that air marshals have a difficult and important job: they must remain vigilant at all times, and operate at 30,000 feet in tight quarters. Air marshals receive specialized training in a variety of law enforcement techniques including blending in with other aviation travelers and identifying when something is out of the ordinary in the aviation environment. They are prepared to react to a wide spectrum of criminal and terrorist events and activities.

FAMs have and will continue to use a variety of tools and work with industry partners to detect, deter, and defeat any potential threat to the aircraft, crew and passengers. They play an important role in protecting travelers in mid-air and are essential to our national security.

Bob Burns - TSA Social Media

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