

TSA moves to deploy new screening technology

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The US Transportation Security Administration said it is moving ahead steadily with procuring and deploying next-generation airport security technology to screen both checked and carry-on baggage, spurred by \$1 billion that was allocated to the agency for aviation security in the \$787 billion stimulus passed by the government.

Assistant Administrator-Office of Security Technology Robin Kane, speaking Friday at the American Assn. of Airport Executives/Dept. of Homeland Security/TSA Aviation Security Summit in Washington, said that "advanced technology" X-ray machines to be deployed at airports throughout the US for carry-on baggage screening will "start coming off the production line in January."

ATs, produced by Rapiscan Systems and Smiths Detection, will "provide clear, high-definition X-ray images that improve TSA security officers' ability to detect potential threat items," according to TSA. "Some AT units also employ multiple X-ray angles, provide high-definition zoom and/or have automated detection capabilities that will further enhance . . . effectiveness. By comparison, currently deployed technology depends on a single, top-down X-ray view."

"We plan to deploy [ATs] at every major airport over the next year," Kane said, adding that a deployment plan is "near final."

Additionally, within the next 30 days TSA will "kick off" the procurement process for next-generation explosive detection system machines, Office of Security Technology Program Manager-Electronic Baggage Screening Jenel Cline said. She added that the agency is targeting December 2010 for awarding contracts for new EDS machines. She noted that TSA is looking for companies to offer machines that can speed baggage throughput while maintaining or improving on current system detection efficiency. She added that it would like to see systems that have a "lighter footprint" and "lower maintenance" costs. "We anticipate there will be a lot of time [spent] in testing [prospective systems] for this procurement," she said.

Rapiscan VP-Global Government Affairs Peter Kant, who also spoke at the conference, said, "There is a major shift in technology. . . relative to scanning passengers and baggage" that will begin to have an impact at airports over the next 1-2 years. The new technology will focus on "improving detection, but doing so with a flexible platform. . . to address new threats." He explained that the systems will be designed to be programmed with upgrades so that new hardware is not needed to handle emerging threats.

New systems also will be faster and smaller to "actually help airports. . . facilitate commerce," he said, noting that EDS machines under development aim to "get the same throughput with one system as three [current] systems. The actual footprint would be dramatically less."