

TSA EMPLOYEES DISCIPLINED FOR SECURITY LAPSES AT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



An internal agency investigation into lapses at the Southwest Florida International Airport, by Transportation and Security employees, has led to the firing of 5 and suspension of 38 workers. They stand accused of failure to appropriately screen passengers last year. Sari Koshetz, a spokeswoman for the TSA issued a statement saying that the investigation came to the conclusion that the employees failed to follow the suitable procedure for random, supplemental screening procedures during an isolated period in 2011. The lapses occurred over a period of two months, during the night shift and affected 300 to 400 passengers. TSA spokesman David Castelveter confirmed that this was one of the largest disciplinary actions TSA has taken in its 10-year history. The 43 employees, who have been penalized, are a mixture of front-line screeners and supervisors. TSA has around 280 employees working at the airport. The management was informed of the employees' callousness, by a TSA employee, who noticed the violations and brought it to the notice of the management. Koshetz however, assured that the travelers were never in danger as a result of the employer's negligence. "It is important to recognize that every passenger and his/her luggage were screened," she wrote in an email. "The additional random screening measures are designed to provide another layer of security." Koshetz said that privacy reasons prevented her from revealing more, adding that more details from the investigations would not be released as they contain security sensitive information. "The decision to take disciplinary action, including the proposed removal of several individuals from the TSA reaffirms our strong commitment to ensure the safety of the traveling public and hold all our employees to the highest standards of conduct and accountability," she wrote in an email. Rep. John Mica, R-FL, who has for long been advocating that airport screening, being such a crucial issue to the country's safety, should be handed over to private companies under TSA supervision. In an interview on Fox & Friends he expressed apprehension that TSA is deliberately keeping the people and the media in the dark. "I think it's a cover up. I really do," Mica said. "They don't want the public to know how bad this expensive bureaucracy is operating from the management on down." Dave Owen, a Dallas resident who was at the airport Monday, felt that without random screenings, things could become troublesome. "If bad people know that they're not doing it, it makes them braver," he said. Other travelers too expressed their worries about the professed shortcomings. "We're paying them to do a job and they're not doing it," said Naples resident Justin Baxter. Koshetz said that the 38 employees were suspended for 2 weeks and that TSA had brought in screeners from other airports to fill in for them. Naples resident Kate Carrano, who was at the airport Monday with her husband, Rudy, said that she felt the airport screening was adequate, "They have a good eye. They do search all the bags," she said. "When we travel and we see the people who are randomly searched, frequently it's an older person in a wheelchair or a small child." Although Carrano said that the security lapses did not worry her, she said that the workers merited being fired, "If it's a part of your job to do something, and you don't do it, you accept responsibility," she said.

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