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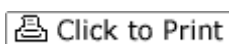
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Fliers without ID placed on TSA list

By Thomas Frank, USA TODAY

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WASHINGTON — The Transportation Security Administration has collected records on thousands of passengers who went to airport checkpoints without identification, adding them to a database of people who violated security laws or were questioned for suspicious behavior.

The TSA began storing the information in late June, tracking many people who said they had forgotten their driver's license or passport at home. The database has 16,500 records of such people and is open to law enforcement agencies, according to the TSA.

Asked about the program, TSA chief Kip Hawley told USA TODAY in an interview Tuesday that the information helps track potential terrorists who may be "probing the system" by trying to get through checkpoints at various airports.

Later Tuesday, Hawley called the newspaper to say the agency is changing its policy effective today and will stop keeping records of people who don't have ID if a screener can determine their identity. Hawley said he had been considering the change for a month. The names of people who did not have identification will soon be expunged, he said.

Civil liberties advocates have been fearful that the database includes passengers who have done nothing wrong yet may face extra scrutiny at airports or questioning by authorities investigating possible terrorism. "This information comes back to haunt people," said Barry Steinhardt of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The TSA has been expanding an electronic database that started a couple of years ago to keep track of people who violated security regulations, most often by bringing a dangerous item to a checkpoint.

The agency then began adding names of people who were questioned by police but not necessarily charged after an airport screener saw them acting suspiciously. In those cases, the TSA can keep records for 15 years of someone's name, address, Social Security number, nationality, race and physical features, as well as identifying information about a traveling companion, according to a report by the Homeland Security Department privacy office.

Hawley said the database will still be used but it will not contain people's names who forgot their identification. Such a database helps the TSA spot patterns of activity that may indicate terrorist planning and refer people to the FBI for possible questioning. "It's just like if a police officer chats to somebody. It's part of the investigative process," Hawley said.

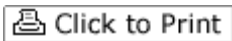
Travelers without ID were added in June after the TSA barred them from airplanes. The agency wanted to identify all passengers to check them against watch lists. Previously, passengers without ID could board airplanes after facing additional searches.

Hawley said the TSA will stop tracking people without ID because they do not automatically represent a security threat. The TSA will still keep records of people who go to checkpoints without ID and then give a false name to screeners.

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