

Transcript of Fox 25 News'
May 6, 2001 Broadcast on Airport Security

Anchor man: After tonight it's probably safe to say that you will never walk through an airport and look at the security system the same way again.

Anchor woman: That's because a Fox Undercover investigation reveals huge loopholes in security where people could easily smuggle dangerous weapons on board an airplane without getting caught. As a result of our investigation some screeners at checkpoints have been fired and many others are being retrained. Investigative reporter Deborah Sherman has our exclusive investigation.

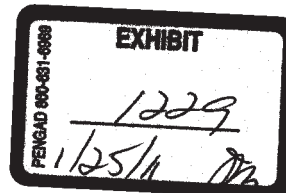
Deborah Sherman: We traveled through two New England airports with hidden cameras to show you how more than 30 million passengers are screened every year. Unlike most travelers, we hoped we would get stopped at the checkpoints and that screeners would carefully examine our bags. That's because we packed items that we knew would trigger alarms. First, this metal knife. We put it inside a money belt and asked a Fox News employee to wear it under his clothes through the security checkpoints. We had another employee in a wheelchair wear this electronic medical device on her back hoping that screeners would find it. We also gave her this fanny pack full of metal items for screeners to search. Finally, we packed a suitcase with two special bags made out of lead. Travelers use these lead bags to protect their film from strong x-rays. So when our luggage goes through the x-ray machine this is what those lead cases will look like, dark, suspicious objects. Screeners won't know if there are knives, guns or even explosives in the bags unless they open the luggage. And one more thing. Since we didn't want to make it too easy on the screeners, we tied our suitcase shut with this plastic tab that can be cut off with scissors. All of the items were taken through the security checkpoints are normally used by travelers and they're items that the Federal Aviation Administration expects screeners to detect. But watch what happens on the first line of defense and security at airports in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Tina Collins: It is just a necessary evil. You have to have it.

Sherman: Whenever Tina Collins and her goddaughter walk through a security checkpoint . . .

Collins: My buckles from the pants set it off.

Sherman: But Tina doesn't mind.



Collins: It makes me feel safer knowing that there is [sic] metal detectors and that everyone has to go through them.

Sherman: But if she feels safe, this man doesn't.

Dan Pranka, Former Pilot: Oh, I think if anybody wanted to hijack an aircraft it would be very easy.

Sherman: Former pilot Dan Pranka was nearly hijacked by a passenger who smuggled on a gun. Pranka and others believe many other weapons are getting past checkpoints undetected.

Steve Elson, Former F.A.A. Special Agent: Explosives, chemicals, chemical weapons, knives, guns, grenades, bombs. Virtually anything you can think of.

Sherman: Steve Elson is a former special agent with the Federal Aviation Administration. He's tested security at airports around the world and now he's going to watch us test security, starting at the Ocean State's TF Green Airport. Remember that knife? Our employee in the blue jacket has the knife hidden in his money belt. And sure enough, it sets off the alarms. The screener sends him through the metal detector three times. Her wand metal detector also keeps beeping. But the screener thinks his belt buckle is causing the problem, so she lets him leave without finding the knife. Next, our employee in the wheelchair. A screener checks her over, but not carefully enough. She never finds that metal device attached to the girl's back. And our suitcase? When it goes through the x-ray machine, screeners can't see through the dark objects and call for a bag check.

Sherman: So what's it look like?

Unidentified Screener: Black.

Sherman: You can't see through that?

Unidentified Screener: No.

Sherman: But when the screener searches our luggage, he only finds one of our lead film bags, not both of them.

Elson: They just simply said: "Oh, good, I found it," and they let you go.

Sherman: We are now behind the security checkpoint and the screeners didn't find this metal device that she had on or this money belt that our photographer was wearing. Either one of these could have been a gun or a bomb. And remember, back here we now have access to every airport in the world.

Sherman: The security company at TF Green Airport tells Fox Undercover it didn't do anything wrong. We also tested Boston's Logan International. In every terminal the hidden knife sets off alarms. This screener searches for 10 seconds then gives up. In all four terminals they wave their wands and waived our employee through security - never finding the knife.

Elson: They could have any sort of device on and you would have it inside the sterile area and access to an aircraft.

Sherman: And here comes our employee in a wheelchair. At each checkpoint the screeners give her the once-over. But all four fail to find the metal device on her back. And three screeners didn't even find or search her fanny pack. And watch what happens in Terminal A. Our employee tries to give the screener her purse but she won't take it, so it was never x-rayed either.

Elson: These people are trying to be kind and considerate, which is fine, but their job is to make sure nothing is going into that screening checkpoint or the sterile area.

Sherman: And finally our suitcase. Only one security company at Logan's International Terminal gave it a perfect check. The screener cut off that plastic tie, found the lead cases and made sure they contained film. But, it's a different story in Terminal C. The screener wanted to look in our suitcase but was confused by that plastic tie. So he searched the outside pockets instead. Even his superior didn't know how to open the luggage. So finally they told us to go ahead without ever opening or examining our suitcase. Surprised? It happened again in Terminal A. Even though screeners saw these suspicious objects, they didn't bother to cut open our suitcase and search it. Overall, screeners in both airports failed to detect 14 out of 15 items.

Sherman: Would you call this security?

Elson: Absolutely not. I mean I don't know how anybody could look and see what we've seen and call it security.

Sherman: Is it safe to say we could have put 14 guns or bombs on airplanes this week?

Elson: At a minimum. You could have done 14 a day.

Sherman: Elson blames the problem on low pay, poor training and a lack of management. The security company for Terminals B & C says it will now retrain its

employees. In Terminal A, the security company says the screeners who did not follow procedures have been fired and others have been suspended following an investigation. The airports are not in charge of the screening checkpoints as you might imagine. The screeners are hired by the airlines and the airlines are regulated by the FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration. So when security fails the buck stops there. The FAA isn't talking on camera but in this fax to Fox Undercover the FAA writes it has an open investigation into the security breaches and says the screeners involved are being retrained to follow FAA required procedures. But there's more. Once behind security checkpoints we found other security violations. At TF Green an airline employee left behind a stack full of boarding passes with passenger information and free flight coupons.

Unidentified person: Anybody could get on a plane with these.

Sherman: At Logan we found gate claim tags for luggage that should have been locked away. A terrorist could put this on a suitcase without ever boarding the plane. Also just by watching airport employees go in and out of that door, we were able to get their access code. That code opens all the doors in Delta's terminal . . . and leads to the airplanes and the runway. We showed our video to Massport's Director of Public Safety, Joe Lawless. We could have boarded any flight with a deadly weapon without getting caught.

Joe Lawless, Massport's Director of Public Safety: As soon as we found out about this we immediately went to the carriers, we immediately called in those security companies and we immediately called in the FAA and said look, this is a problem, you have to fix this right now.

Sherman: Lawless is so disturbed by our test results he says Massport for the first time will start performing tests like ours. While he says screeners over the years have detected some weapons, we now know some could also be getting on airplanes.

Pranka: I was amazed at what you showed me, totally unbelievable.

Sherman: This former pilot, who's now a travel agent, still worries about his passengers. What should the traveler at home watching our investigation think about security?

Pranka: I think they should be aware of the fact that when they do go through security or board an aircraft, that possibly they could be on an airplane that may be hijacked or detained by terrorists.

Sherman: The FAA is investigating the security breaches. Delta Airlines faces a possible

\$11,000 fine for not protecting its security code to the terminal doors. We'd like to tell you now that security has improved, but even after we showed the security companies what we found, we tested a second time and once again at Terminal B screeners did not open and search our luggage. I'm Deborah Sherman for Fox Undercover.