



The Consumer Council

Elizabeth House
116 Holywood Road
Belfast BT4 1NY
Tel 028 9067 2488
Fax 028 9065 7701
e mail

rsimpson@consumercouncil.org.uk

Our Ref: 3/4/2.00

Mike Alcock
Department for Transport
Zone 5/12
Southside
Victoria Street
London SW1E 6DT

16 June 2010

Dear Mr Alcock

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department for Transport's (DfT) Consultation on the Code of Practice for the use of advanced imaging technology in an aviation security environment.

The Consumer Council was established in 1985 and has statutory responsibility under the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 to protect and promote the interests of passengers travelling to, from and within Northern Ireland. The Consumer Council is responsible for handling complaints and enquiries from passengers travelling by bus, train, air and sea. We work at a policy level to promote consumer interests and improve systems and procedures that lead to complaints arising. The Consumer Council has been designated the complaints handling body for Northern Ireland under European Regulation (EC) no. 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air.

1. Privacy

The Consumer Council welcomes the DfT's requirement for airport operators to ensure an effective privacy policy is in place to protect passengers during body scanner screening. The requirement that scanning equipment must be situated so that the security officer viewing the image is unable to see the person whose image they are viewing as well as the stipulation that the security officer resolving any potential issues is not permitted to view the scanned image will provide reassurance for passengers who are concerned about possible privacy implications.

It is important that passengers selected for screening are informed by security staff that they may request that the screen reader is of the same sex as the passenger. In its current draft the code of practice states that a passenger may make this request but does not state that passengers will be informed this option is available to them.

This information should be clearly displayed to inform passengers of the security procedures in place. Passengers should not have to request such information. The information displayed must be clear and accessible to all passengers including passengers who do not speak English and passengers with learning difficulties.

The Consumer Council believes more detail should be provided regarding the method of communication to be employed between the screen reader and the body searcher. To minimise disruption to the passenger a method of communication must be employed which will not require the body searcher to leave the passenger to receive instruction from the screen reader. Given the body searcher must not be permitted to view the scanned image nor the screen reader the passenger, the code of practice should stipulate a requirement for the members of security personnel involved in the search to communicate, for example, via two way radio or similar method.

The Consumer Council is aware of a number of serious concerns that have been expressed by passengers and in particular passengers with a disability or reduced mobility (PRM) regarding the possible invasion of their privacy. It is therefore essential that privacy policies are clearly communicated to passengers. Where passengers have particular concerns it is important these are dealt with in a sensitive manner and that the safeguards put in place for ensuring passenger privacy are strictly adhered to and clearly communicated to passengers.

2. Health and Safety

The Consumer Council welcomes the independent assessments that have been carried out to evaluate possible risks to health from the use of body scanners. These have indicated body scanners present no risk to individuals with a pacemaker, internal defibrillator or other implantable device. It is important, however, that this information is provided in writing on request to

any passengers who are selected for scanning who use one of the above mentioned devices.

Passengers should be offered the option of discussing their medical condition with a member of airport security staff in a private environment prior to using the body scanner to allay any concerns the passenger may have.

3. Training

The Consumer Council welcomes the requirement for security officers to receive appropriate training including how to deal with issues sensitively and protect privacy. The Consumer Council also welcomes the requirement that security scanner training should be fully incorporated within existing training procedures, requiring initial and refresher training for all staff. It is important that refresher training addresses any unforeseen issues identified during body scanning, for example, areas where complaints have been made by passengers.

Consumer Council research conducted with PRMs has identified the difficulties PRMs can face when processing through airport security. PRMs explain that problems often arise as a result of inadequate staff training concerning how to accommodate passengers' needs appropriately and sensitively. These concerns are likely to increase as a result of the introduction of body scanners. Comprehensive staff training is therefore essential to address this issue and minimise disruption caused to all passengers.

It is also important that regular assessments of staff performance are conducted and monitoring systems are in place to ensure staff fully adhere to the policies in place to maintain the dignity of passengers.

4. Communication

The Consumer Council recognises the introduction of body scanning will increase the safety of air travel for all passengers. This process is, however, likely to cause concern for a number of reasons including fears over health implications or the privacy of passengers. It is therefore crucial that the reason for requiring passengers to use body scanners is clearly explained and procedures are in place to ensure the privacy of passengers is protected.

All information provided to passengers should be made available in a range of alternative formats including Braille and large print and in various languages as appropriate. Staff should also be trained to communicate with passengers with learning difficulties.

In order to reduce passenger confusion or anxiety it is important that information regarding the use of scanners is provided prior to passengers arriving at the airport. Airlines and travel agents should be required to provide passengers with general information concerning body scanners during the

booking process. Airports should have a link to information concerning body scanners on their websites, and airport call handlers should be trained to answer passengers' queries should passengers require further advice or guidance.

If you wish to discuss this matter in further detail please do not hesitate to contact Ryan Simpson, rsimpson@consumercouncil.org.uk or by telephone on 028 9067 2488.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Simpson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ryan Simpson
Interim Head of Transport