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TRANSPORTATION SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE
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AIRPORT SECURITY

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**TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM E. HOLDEN,
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House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection

Testimony of William E. Holden, Senior Vice, President
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Chairwoman Jackson-Lee, Ranking Member Lungren, Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection – I would like to thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing to discuss Airport Security.

BACKGROUND

Covenant Aviation Security was awarded a contract as part of the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Security Screening Pilot Program on October 10, 2002. We are currently providing both passenger and baggage screeners at San Francisco International Airport, a Category X airport, and Sioux Falls Regional Airport, a Category II airport. Covenant was the only private contractor to be awarded more than one airport under the Privatization Pilot Program (PP5). I would like to point out the compressed time frame from contract award on October 10, 2002, until staffing all checkpoints on November 19, 2002, and providing fully trained screeners for checked baggage on January 1, 2003. Covenant Aviation was successful in meeting both of these federally mandated deadlines.

Covenant successfully deployed over 1,100 security screeners to all passenger checkpoints at San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Tupelo Regional Airport (TUP) during the very brief 39-day transition period (October 10, 2002 – November 19, 2002). Additionally, Covenant staffed all baggage checkpoints by January 1, 2003 for a total of 1,453 screeners hired, trained and deployed within the TSA-mandated timelines. Covenant was awarded screening operations at Sioux Falls Regional Airport in February 2006. Tupelo Regional Airport was awarded to Trinity Technology Group in May 2006 as a small business set aside contract with the TSA. Covenant provides management services for Trinity.

The Covenant team offers extensive experience in airport operations, security and personnel management capable of providing the Government cost effective and value added solutions. Our company mission states our commitment to provide dedicated aviation security services for the safe and efficient movement of people and cargo within the United States and its territories. One benefit Covenant has capitalized on is the dedication and support we have received from the Airport Directors, Mr. John Martin of San Francisco, Mr. Terry Anderson of Tupelo and Mr. Mike Marnach of Sioux Falls.

In addition, our collaborative relationships with the Federal Security Directors' in San Francisco, Mr. Ed Gomez and Mr. Mark Heisey in Sioux Falls, South Dakota have enabled us to provide exceptional service and is a contributing factor in successfully maintaining the mission focus. The "Team SFO" and "Team FSD" concept represents the joint efforts of Airport Management, the Federal Security Director including their staffs and Covenant. These relationships were built over time and a result of Covenant consistently demonstrating the ability to overcome challenges and supporting the TSA and its mission.

EMPLOYEE SCREENING

At both San Francisco International and the Sioux Falls Regional Airport, Covenant Aviation Security's contract scope has been increased by the TSA to include Aviation Direct Access Screening Program (ADASP) screening. ADASP screening entails the screening of airport personnel who have access to secure areas of the airport. Airport personnel having the appropriate credentials and access rights can enter into the airport sterile area without going through checkpoint security. Through the ADASP, airport personnel and their belongings are subject to rigorous screening standards to prevent the introduction of prohibited items into an airport's sterile area. The ADASP represents a significant step forward by the TSA to ensure the safety of the flying public."

ADASP was implemented by TSA in 2007 and requires additional procedures to expand screening to include direct access points into the Air Operations Area (AOA). It is important to note that there is an extensive background check process for all airport community employees.

ADASP is conducted on a random and unpredictable basis to accomplish the following:

- i. Look for improper ID media
- ii. Ensure that all checked ID's do not show signs of tampering
- iii. Look for non-visible airport ID media
- iv. Ensure that prohibited items on the TSA prohibited list do not gain access to the AOA
- v. Check individuals and their accessible property entering direct access areas other than check point entries, resolving all alarms.

The majority of all employees that work in the airport community and possess a badge issued by the Security Access Office for San Francisco International Airport (SFO) as well as their belongings go through the same screening process as the traveling public. They proceed through a walk through metal detector and their personal or job related possessions are screened by an x-ray machine. If there is an alarm of any kind they are subject to Hand Wanding, bag searches or a pat down of their person. They are subjected to the screening process every time they leave the sterile area and wish to re-enter.

Employees in the airport community are airline employees (inclusive of management and flight crews), vendors working for the airlines or city/airport employees. In SFO and FSD the certified screeners that work for Covenant must go through the security check point each time they enter the sterile area.

CHALLENGES AND IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

Due to the fact the two airports we service are distinctly different (Category X and Category II) they bring individualized operational issues to the table. I will begin by discussing solutions we implemented in San Francisco and Sioux Falls.

STAFFING

The current staffing level in San Francisco is 815 full time employees. The TSA authorized staffing level is 845. Covenant teamed with the FSD, Mr. Gomez and his staff, determined the required hours of operation by incorporating information collected on passenger throughput and passenger waiting time in order to “right-size” the screener workforce. Covenant has been successful in reducing the number of employees without jeopardizing the level of security, customer service levels or experiencing an increase in wait times.

We currently have 84 part-time employees which provides Covenant the flexibility to schedule those individuals where needed in order to meet the demand. To my knowledge, we were the first airport to establish a part-time workforce.

Sioux Falls is staffed with 32 full time employees and 4 part time employees.

SCREENING CONTROL CENTER

The FSD, Airport Director and Covenant recognized the need for a Command and Control center for the entire airport. Due to the dispersed locations of the checkpoints and three separate terminals it became apparent for a communication system that provided a link to the TSA, airport staff and law enforcement officials.

The Screening Control Center (SCC) concept of Command and Control was developed with the TSA SFO Executive Team and the SFO Airport Commission to provide a centralized resource to improve operating efficiencies of the screening workforce. The SCC is located in the Airport Communications Center and includes a Closed Circuit Television system (CCTV). The SCC is manned 24/7 in order to constantly monitor the operation of SFO’s 39 checkpoint lanes and the queuing passengers at checkpoints.

A major function of the SCC operators is to move screeners to checkpoint/ baggage workstations during ‘off-peak’ hours to work in locations where additional screeners are needed. Additionally, the SCC takes calls reporting out-of-service Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) and oversees the dispatch of Siemens, Boeing and InVision technicians decreasing the downtime of essential screening equipment.

Due to the success we had with the Screening Control Center in San Francisco we implemented it at Sioux Falls at no cost to the TSA or the airport.

SAFETY, ON-THE-JOB INJURIES (OJI) & WORKERS COMPENSATION CLAIMS

Covenant, along with most airports, was experiencing a high number of Worker's Compensation Claims that resulted in significant amounts of money being paid out in claims. Covenant has taken steps to aggressively manage this issue. In early 2003, Covenant management initiated both a part-time screener job classification and a return-to-work program for screeners who have been injured while performing their screener duties. Although they cannot return to full-time employment, they are available to work in a restricted duty capacity (jobs assigned by medical restrictions). Covenant, with FSD approval, has hired a Workers Compensation Specialist to review claims for cost containment and who manages the return-to-work program.

ATTENDANCE CONTROL CENTER (ACC)

Covenant's absentee rates were fluctuating on a monthly basis and at one point went as high as 14.7%. The Covenant management team along with the guidance of the FSD, Mr. Gomez, knew we needed to get this issue under control. In May 2003, Covenant opened the Attendance Control Center and our absentee rate began to decrease almost immediately. Our absentee rate is 3.6%.

The ACC is an innovation that provides a center of communication on current staffing levels at all checkpoints. The ACC works in conjunction with the SCC by reporting actual numbers of personnel at the start of each shift and compares them to the established schedule. The SCC in turn can efficiently reassign personnel to ensure that screening operations are maintained by staffing the areas most critical to operational continuity.

Of particular note, Absent-Without-Leave (AWOL) has been significantly reduced due to management actions taken by Covenant in administering the Attendance and Disciplinary policies. The ACC assists in reviewing and addressing employee attendance performance through counseling or disciplining as appropriate. Having one central location performing this function ensures that applications of discipline for attendance infractions are consistent across all terminal checkpoint and baggage operations.

ASSESSMENT

Covenant recognized the staffing deficiency occurring nationwide. In addition, Covenant could foresee the problems that would occur while waiting, possibly six months, for TSA's subcontractor, CPS to arrive and perform the assessments. During those six months, service levels would be compromised along with rising costs if the usage of overtime hours increased.

With the assistance of the FSD, Covenant has developed a proven approach that was first demonstrated with the hiring of Baggage Handlers. Since then Covenant has conducted several assessments for the recruitment of part-time and full-time passenger and baggage screeners for San Francisco International Airport. The method is a phased approach including three phases (1)

recruitment, (2) pre-screening and (3) assessment. Covenant is responsible for the entire assessment process. The percentage of candidates who will successfully meet the full assessment criteria is increased by validating minimum qualification criteria early in the selection process. Pre-screening candidates provides cost-efficient methodologies for ensuring expenses are not incurred for assessing unqualified candidates. Covenant uses actual screeners to assist in panel interviews with candidates so that operational experience is brought to bear in assessing potential employees.

TRAINING

The airport screening environment presents multiple challenges to any training program due in large part to its 24/7 operation and large number of screeners who work various shifts, days of the week, and terminals, yet still must receive the same consistent information and direction that greatly impact security and passenger safety.

Covenant developed a Training Academy that includes an onsite computer learning lab that serves as the “hub” of all training and certification activities. The lab consists of 55 stand-alone PC computers equipped with CD-ROM and headset. Initially, the computers were used primarily for image recognition training—three hours per week. Now screeners have a library of CD-ROMs to choose from that include hidden weapons, screening of footwear, hand-wanding, full body pat down review, back injury prevention, harassment-free workplace, and Hazmat guidelines. In addition, operational equipment can be dispatched to the lab for hands-on training

related to operational testing and weekly/monthly maintenance procedures. The Computer Learning Lab has become an integral part of the screener’s daily activities—right along side the screening of passengers and checked baggage.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Covenant recognizes the problems federally run airports are experiencing in terms of human resource functions. At times these processes are very confusing and time consuming due to the excessive layers involved in the TSA process.

Covenant realizes the importance of communicating information regarding benefits, policies, and resources available to our employees to maintain positive employee morale. By having a local human resource department Covenant is able to service the employees better. For example, Covenant has the flexibility to promote individuals based on performance and on the other hand can remove an individual from a position if required. Covenant can handle simple matters such as a pay discrepancy the same day. The flexibility has allowed us to implement such employee programs as an Employee Assistance Center, Employee Relations Management system, recognition programs and alternative work schedules without waiting for approval from TSA headquarters.

Having Covenant provide human resource functions allow the FSD to focus on his main objective – security, rather than trying to resolve personnel issues.

BEST PRACTICES (SFO)

Covenant Aviation Security (CAS) is contracted to perform the Aviation Transportation Security Act screening procedures. While fulfilling all of the requirements of the contract and the TSA Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) we have developed some “best practices” that have elevated SFO’s performance.

- CAS runs a test every 30 minutes at every operational screening lane of randomly chosen prohibited items (IED’s-Improvised Explosive Devices)
- CAS exceeds the hours required for all computer based training, OLC (on-line computer) and TRX (image). CAS has installed computers close to check points and in break areas so employees can readily access all computer based programs.
- CAS has supplied each check point with “image books”. The image books are x-ray pictures of actual bags with every day items and some IED and prohibited item materials. The front of the page is the images generated, the back of the page clearly defines the images.
- CAS contracts with companies that covertly try to breach security by having prohibited items or IED parts in their bags or on their person. What separates our testing is CAS makes the testing difficult. The better the score means that we need to make the tests harder. CAS provides a monetary incentive when employees “catch” prohibited items or IED related materials.
- CAS has a pro-active Dual Function Screener (DFS) program. DFS’ advantages are improved morale (employees are scheduled for two weeks in baggage and two weeks at check points), heightened skills (because they must know and test in both areas) and operational improvements. If there is an operational problem the DFS program gives CAS flexibility at reacting to security issues.

Best practices that are applicable will be implemented in Sioux Falls.

CONCLUSION

The FSD oversight and partnership we’ve developed has played a major role in the successful operation at both San Francisco and Sioux Falls airports. The FSDs, Mr. Gomez and Mr. Mark Heisey and their staffs require Covenant to justify/explain the following metrics on a weekly basis: overtime, attendance, OJI’s, attrition and wait times for passengers. Recent statistics show that SFO metrics surpass other Category X airports in the Western Area in the areas of attendance, overtime and attrition. The guiding principle for Covenant management is “If we cannot measure it, we cannot manage it.”

Covenant strongly supports the screening of all employees in accordance with the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2002, Section 44903 of title 49, United States Code.