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Effects of 9/11 Still Felt Today in American Airports

By: Justin Hartsell

UNITED STATES — Despite [9/11](#) being 18 years ago, the effects from the events continue within the United States' airline industry. A single day in American history caused a drastic increase in air travel security and placed more regulations on the industry's operations.

Lead Aircraft Maintenance Technician Darrel Hartsell works for [Delta Airlines](#) at [Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport](#) in Atlanta, Georgia. He has worked for Delta since 1990 and is a [United States Air Force](#) veteran—making for 34 years of aviation experience. Hartsell has seen first-hand the changes brought about by the September 11 attacks.

“Before 9/11, you still had security, but it was a lot more lax,” said Hartsell. “It was much easier. It [9/11] definitely put a spotlight on security.”

Hartsell went on to explain that following the attacks, non-flying individuals used to be able to accompany passengers to the terminal before the plane was boarded. Family members, significant others and friends “didn't have to have credentials” to go through security, explained Hartsell. “You used to be able to go to the gate, give them a hug, and have a sob session,” said Hartsell. Now, unless an individual has a ticket, they are not allowed to go past security.



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In regards to security, Hartsell pointed out that 9/11 resulted in the introduction of x-ray machines used on passengers. In addition were the requirements for passengers to take their belts and shoes off, along with a limitation on the size of fluids they are allowed to take on.

According to [The Libertarian Institute](#), Congress passed the [Aviation and Transportation Security Act \(ATSA\)](#) on November 19, 2001—which created the [Transportation Security Agency \(TSA\)](#). [President George W. Bush](#) signed the bill into law.

According to the [Conde Nast Traveler](#), \$100 billion has been spent in efforts to increase security in airports and airplanes.

[Air marshals](#) being present on all flights “have been born from this,” said Hartsell. “They blend in from other passengers—with often more than one on a plane, sometimes traveling in pairs.” However, Hartsell highlighted the specifics of the exact number air marshals on a flight is confidential and withheld from him or other airline personnel.

“They are armed with guns, and they are strategically placed,” said Hartsell. “They are strategically placed—to my understanding—on the plane. So there might be one or more in first-class, business class, coach class...but you’d never know it. They are inconspicuous.”

Increased security within the airport prior to boarding the plane is visible to passengers scurrying to terminals like ants swarming around one another. However, heightened security has become commonplace in behind-the-scenes operations post-9/11.



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Hartsell reported, "Aircrafts are watched must closer." Entrance stands and entrance gaits that allow individuals to access the plane must be pulled back when the plane is parked. "We always pull them away at least six feet from the door," said Hartsell.

In addition to regulations on entrance stands, Hartsell said that several cameras are on a parked plane. Furthermore, "customs will put a piece of tape over the fuselage door. It's like a tampered seal in a package," said Hartsell. "If the seal is broken, they will know someone has tried to access the plane."

Within the interior of the plane, tamper seals are placed in bathrooms. Hartsell explained this prevents passengers from being able to try and stash items behind the sealed compartments.

"One thing you saw real quick after 9/11 was the cockpits got beefed up," said Hartsell. "They really got fortified." He went on to explain that the doors were made out of a fiberglass material, and following 9/11, maintenance personnel immediately had to install "metal bars across the door" until the doors could be reengineered. Once engineers redesigned the cockpit's structure, the overall "structure of the aircraft all got beefed up."

Barbara Peterson, author of the article ["How Airport Security Has Changed Since 9/11,"](#) wrote that post-9/11, cockpits have become "sealed off," meaning that pilots are now locked in during the flight. The only exception to this is when a pilot needs to go the restroom, in which case a trained flight attendant guards the door. In addition to

increased cockpit safety, the Federal Flight Deck Officer gave pilots the permission—with proper training—to carry guns.

Peterson writes that the next step being considered for larger jets is to construct two subsequent doors to pass through in order to access the cockpit.



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According to Peterson, checked luggage went straight to the aircraft without being checked for weapons or explosive devices. Following the terrorist attacks, an extensive “underground, ‘in-line’ bag screening system” is used to monitor all checked bags.

“When you get on an airplane, it’s been vetted really well,” said Hartsell. “For international flights, [airline personnel] take all seat cushions, pull them out of the seats and inspect thoroughly.”

Despite increased security measures, one may ask if these procedures created since 9/11 has improved safety. Sam Jacobs, author of the article [“The TSA and Security Theater: Understanding American Airport Security Following 9/11.”](#) would argue “no.”

Jacobs frequently uses the term “security theater,” which he describes as “[providing] the appearance of enhanced security without actually making anyone more secure.”

An example of security theater to Jacobs is how on September 12, 2001 the [National Guard](#) was posted at airports with unloaded guns.

Jacobs highlights that TSA has a tendency to make decisions in an effort to respond to the past, rather than preparing for threats in the future.



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Peterson points out in her article that “terrorists adapt.” For Peterson, it is not enough for attention to be solely focused on TSA checkpoints and airplanes themselves. Pointing to terrorist attacks in Brussels and Istanbul as examples, lobbies and check-ins are largely neglected even in the U.S. when issues of security come up.

According to Jacobs, the [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#) had agents go undercover and assess TSA security. The examination found that equipment and procedural failures occurred “more than half the time.” Failure to detect weapons was at 80%, while failure to fake explosives was at 95%. An undercover DHS agent was patted down in one such test for setting off the metal detector and was given a thorough pat down, but the fake bomb strapped to his back went unnoticed by the TSA agent.



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TSA now offers [TSA PreCheck](#) to help make the security process more efficient—both for passengers and TSA agents. In addition, [TSA is requiring that by October 1, 2020](#), all passengers have a star on their identification cards (i.e. drivers license) to serve as proof of it being a real ID before being allowed to pass through security. ✓