

Defense Travel System to modify reservation

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Defense Travel System to modify reservation process

June 10, 2009 - Minor changes are scheduled to take place within the Defense Department's travel reservation system later this summer to support the Transportation Security Administration's new pre-flight screening program, a Defense Department official said today.

Under the current format, when travelers arrange flight, hotel and rental car reservations online at the Defense Travel System Web site, the only personal information the site processes through to the vendors is the traveler's first name, last name and middle initial. But after the system and Web site modifications take effect, the traveler's date of birth and gender will be included to comply with the TSA's Secure Flight Program, said Pam Mitchell, director of the Defense Travel Management Office.

Defense travelers will be prompted by a pop-up screen from the DTS Web site to add the information, as well as to enter their name as it appears on their government-issued identification card. The change will be minimally inconvenient to the traveler, as the information will be entered only once then saved to their profile, Mitchell said.

The program is an outcome of the 9/11 Commission, and it basically streamlines the process of identifying potential passengers deemed a match on the FBI-generated watch list screened by the airlines, Paul Leyh, the program's director, said.

Before the program officially began last month, the various airlines each had their own screening processes, which was inconsistent and inconvenient for many travelers, Leyh said. It's not uncommon for a passenger's information to be identified as a match on one airline's list but cleared through another's, he added.

"From carrier to carrier, because the process is different, it's inconsistent across all carriers," he said. "Throughout the world there are hundreds of carriers, and it could be kind of a crap shoot for people. But with Secure Flight, it's going to be the same process for that person regardless of the carrier."

With the Secure Flight Program, the TSA eventually will become the sole prescreening agency for all

airline passengers. The program officially started in May with several domestic airlines, but within 18 months, every airline – international and domestic – that travels within, to, from and over the United States will be phased into the program, he said.

This will improve the safety of more than 2.5 million people, Leyh added. Also, travelers who've been misidentified as a close-enough match on the watch list can apply for a redress number through TSA to prevent future inconveniences. If cleared, the redress number also will be added to their profile in DTS.

"With nearly every commercial airline participating, watch list matching is going to be more effective, which is going to allow us to clear more people and focus on those potential travelers that are considered as a close enough match," he said.

The program will virtually go unnoticed by the passengers, officials said, as no changes to the airline check-in or security checkpoint procedures are involved. Once defense travelers make the initial modifications to their profile on the DTS Web site, officials added, the program's changes will not affect them unless their information matches the watch list.