



AIRPORT SCREENING PROCEDURES AS APPLIED TO SIKH TRAVELERS AND YOUR RIGHTS AS A SIKH AIR TRAVELER

Last Revised: January 13, 2011

In October 2010, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) informed us that turbaned Sikh travelers at U.S. airports should *always* expect to undergo secondary screening in the form of a turban pat-down (either a passenger self pat-down or an officer pat-down) and/or a metallic detector wand over the turban.

This guide for Sikh air travelers is meant to explain these procedures so that the community understands what to expect at a U.S. airport. In no way is this guide meant to be an endorsement of these procedures. It is simply meant to explain these procedures as explained to our organization by the DHS and TSA.

After reviewing our guide on screening procedures, please be sure to review your rights as a traveler below, and please report any violations to the Sikh Coalition.

Airport Screening Procedures As Applied To Sikh Travelers

Two Primary Screening Technologies Employed

As their primary screening technology, airports around the United States employ either:

1. Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) machines; or
2. Traditional walk-through metal detectors

While most checkpoints only have metal detectors, many airports are now installing AIT machines. This guide will therefore review screening procedures for both technologies.

Please note that the AIT machines are new whole body imaging devices that will be installed in many airports over the coming years. According to the TSA, it is likely that walk-through metal detectors will be phased out.

Screening Technology One - AIT Machines

- (1) You will initially be directed to go through the AIT Machine: At airports where AIT machines are the primary form of screening, all passengers are directed to be screened using this technology;

- (2) You can opt-out of going through the AIT Machine but will be subjected to a rigorous pat down if you opt-out: You have a right to opt-out of being screened by an AIT machine. However, if you opt-out of using the AIT machine, your entire body, including your turban, will be subjected to what the TSA calls an “enhanced pat-down.” Many equate this “enhanced pat-down” to a rigorous “prison style” pat-down.
- (3) Going Through the AIT Machine – You Have the Right to Wear Your Turban, But You Will Still Have to Undergo Additional Screening: Although you can wear your turban when going through an AIT machine, this will not save you from more screening afterwards. As explained to us by the TSA, AIT machines cannot see through the layers of a standard Sikh turban.
- (4) Because the AIT Machine Cannot See Through Your Turban, It Will be Subjected to Both a “Pat-Down” (a self pat-down or TSA administered pat-down) and a Scan with a Metal Detecting Wand – The AIT machine is designed to screen for both metallic and non-metallic items. Because the machine cannot see through your turban, your turban must first go through a pat-down (either self-administered or administered by a TSA screener) to scan for non-metallic threat items. After this procedure is finished, your turban will now also be subjected to a hand-held metal detector wand search to scan for metallic threat items.

Please keep in mind that you can always pat-down your own turban. Your turban should also not be ordered removed unless a screener detects something dangerous in your turban either at the pat-down or metal-detecting stage. To avoid false alarms, we recommend that you wash your hands before entering the screening area.

Screening Technology Two – Metal Detectors

Most airports still employ metal detectors only (though they will likely be phased out in the future). The following is the procedure for those machines as applied to Sikhs:

- (1) You will be directed to go through the metal detector – All passengers will be directed to go through a metal detector. This is not optional.
- (2) After going through a metal detector, Sikh passengers should now *always* expect to be subjected to a pat-down (self pat-down or TSA administered pat-down) – As explained to us by the TSA, because a turban does not fit the “natural contours” of the body, it should *always* be subjected to a pat-down (either self-administered or administered by a TSA screener) to screen for non-metallic threat items.

Please again keep in mind that you can always pat-down your own turban. Your turban should also not be ordered removed unless a screener detects something of danger in your turban, either at the pat-down or metal detecting stage. To avoid false alarms, we recommend that you wash your hands before entering the screening area.

Important Note: According to the TSA, if your turban or hands trigger an alarm during explosive trace detection sampling, you will be required to undergo private screening and remove your turban to resolve the concern.



Sikh Air Travelers' Bill of Rights

Sikhs who are clearing security at United States airports have the following rights:

1. Sikhs have the right to wear turbans, patkas or religious scarves during security screenings at American airports. However, according to TSA, if an alarm is triggered, either because of a metal detector or turban pat-down, you will be required to undergo private screening and remove your turban to resolve the concern.
2. Sikhs, if selected for additional screening, have the right to ask to pat-down their own turbans and have their hands swabbed for chemical residue, instead of allowing a TSA screener to pat-down their turbans. To avoid false alarms, we recommend that you wash your hands before entering the screening area.
3. Sikhs have the right to refuse to remove their turbans in public and instead request a private area to have their turban screened.
4. Sikhs have the right to refuse to remove their turbans if they have successfully cleared the AIT machine, metal detection procedure, and/or an additional screening pat-down.
5. Sikhs have the right not to be profiled by TSA officers on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion or national origin.

If you feel you are being mistreated or singled out for screening because of your turban, remember to do the following:

1. Stay calm. Treat and speak with the TSA officer professionally.
2. Ask the TSA officer for his/her name and badge number. Write this information down. They are required to give this information to you. If they refuse, ask to speak with a supervisor.
3. Call or email the Sikh Coalition to report the incident as soon as possible after it has occurred. You will need to give us detailed information, including the name and badge number of the officer, the date of the incident, your flight number, the airport where it occurred, and a description of the incident.
4. You can also file a complaint directly with the TSA on your own on their website at http://www.tsa.dhs.gov/research/civilrights/civilrights_travelers.shtm. You can refer to the TSA's website for more information on any procedure described here.