

# Air Transport Security



With its letters and logo emblazoned on the badges of more than 4,300 airport screening officers, most Canadians boarding a flight in this country should recognize the name CATSA (Canadian Air Transport Security Authority). Few, however, are fully aware of its critical role in the global security system.

A few key numbers illustrate the depth and breadth of CATSA's responsibilities and number one priority: aviation security. Through a public-private partnership, CATSA annually screens 35 million passengers and nearly 60 million pieces of luggage at 89 airports from coast to coast. The CATSA success can be attributed in large part to our customer-oriented approach which encourages cooperation. Most travelers realize the importance of screening because, quite bluntly, it saves lives.

We are noticing, however, a disturbing trend. Too many Canadians are taking a lackadaisical approach to their security.

Experienced travelers seem to get it right, but there are still too many people who don't consider security regulations when packing. Last year alone, CATSA screening officers intercepted over 738,000 prohibited items, including toy guns, knives and live ammunition. These objects required over 64,000 screening hours – time that should have been used to focus on more serious threats.

Another disturbing issue involves the occasional unruly passengers. Last year, our frontline officers faced 131 such incidents. And we know that many more go unreported.

Airport screening is not a solo effort; CATSA works with partners at home and around the globe to build the most seamless air transportation security system possible. Together with airports, airlines, government and security agencies, and passengers themselves, we address potential threats through a multi-level security system.

On one level, passengers see and experience our screening procedures – a process averaging under two minutes per

passenger. CATSA is equally vigilant on a less-visible level – we inspect baggage through a combination of manual checks and world-class detection equipment at designated airports. Each airport has a unique solution based on its configuration and passenger volume. CATSA's operations meet and exceed screening recommendations set by the Security Committee of the International Aviation Organization (ICAO).

CATSA also screens airport workers and air crews entering restricted areas, nearly half a million personnel last year alone. By the end of 2005, we will have a fingerprint and iris recognition system in place for some 125,000 personnel, making Canada a true leader in biometric technology.

However, no matter how current the equipment may be, airport security ultimately relies on humans and how well they make split-second decisions. That is why CATSA ensures our service providers recruit the right people and arms them with the best training available.

Our custom-developed training program focuses on three key areas: security; customer service; and technology. Each officer goes through 184 hours of training.

The investment of \$4,500, to train and uniform each officer, results in a highly-skilled workforce with very low turnover. But it doesn't stop there. CATSA continually monitors performance and provides

regular refresher training with mandatory re-certification every two years.

Airport security was not invented as a result of 9/11. However, those tragic attacks have resulted in tremendous strides to help prevent a reoccurrence or mitigate the effects of an attempt. CATSA contributes to policing programs at major airports. The Crown Corporation also funds air carrier protective officers.

An active partner in the broader global security network, we exchange information with world partners to detect new and emerging threats to civil aviation and take a leadership role in organizing international conferences and symposia to share best practices. Together, our efforts since the September 11th attacks are paying off.

Passenger feedback is a good barometer. Air traffic today surpasses pre-9/11 levels, showing Canadians' renewed trust in air travel. Furthermore, 94% of the travelling public is satisfied with the quality of customer service CATSA delivers. And we rely on cooperation from Canadian travellers to help us perform our job as efficiently as possible, and get them safely to their destination.

We have set the bar high and we have surpassed many targets. However, we cannot afford to be complacent. In our fight with constantly evolving threats, stagnation and status quo are no ally to improvement.

No one can let down their guard. Key to this is staying ahead of the ever-changing threat. Will the threat we faced four years ago remain the threat of the future? The bottom line is our air security system has to adapt faster than the threat. And we will continue to adapt to keep Canadians safe. **F**

*Mark Duncan is Chief Operating Officer at the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA).*

