

Terror Arrests Could Affect Businesspeople, McTevia Says

Business travelers fear a carry-on ban

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BY JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

From a business traveler's laptop computer to a college student's backpack, carry-on luggage almost defines the way Americans travel today.

That's why any hint of banning carry-on bags and electronic devices in the wake of Thursday's security crisis in Britain has travel professionals worried. For business travelers in particular, banning laptops and BlackBerry wireless e-mail devices, as British security officials did at least temporarily after Thursday's scare, would raise major concerns.

"What business traveler's going to check a \$2,000 computer with sensitive corporate data? It's going to get stolen, lost or damaged," said Kevin Mitchell, chairman of the Radnor, Pa.-based Business Travel Coalition.

"And imagine what's going to happen to the baggage systems around the country if every overnight bag had to be checked. That's another 45 minutes for a business traveler on each end," he added.

Most travel experts don't believe federal security officials will go anywhere near that far. Instead, they expect everyone to adjust to the new rules of the game, which since Thursday forbid carry-on bags to include any liquids or gels, including toothpaste or contact lens solution.

But even the thought of banning carry-on items had seasoned travelers worried.

"It would be a huge inconvenience, because we run a 24/7 operation here and you need access to phone or e-mail constantly," said Mike Evans, executive vice president for business development at Atlas Oil in Taylor. "Most executives today get a minimum of 25 to 50 e-mails a day easily."

Lost productivity is a concern because business travelers often work on their electronic devices up until the time they must board the plane.

"If business travelers were forced to check their business tools in checked luggage, all the time they would spend boarding planes would be a serious loss in productivity," said Jim McTevia, principal of McTevia and Associates in Bingham Farms. "It would create a lot of disturbances in the business world, I would imagine in the millions of dollars in lost productivity."

Stan Stein, an account director with the public relations firm Weber Shandwick World Wide, who travels 15 to 20 times a year, often internationally, agreed.

"It's a lot simpler to carry a bag on the plane than to check one," said Stein of Bloomfield Hills. "Even when I travel internationally, I carry my own bag."

He added, "It's very involved to check in a bag especially when you have connections. There's now an additional risk of losing bags."

Richard Shainin, of Vienna, Va., flies to Detroit weekly from Washington, D.C., with his investigative technologies business, which has offices in Livonia.

As he prepared to fly out today, he wondered what he'd do with his toiletry bag, which he carries in his only bag -- a carry-on.

"Should I throw away everything that's in my toiletries kit or should I have two sets? Should I have one at places where I travel often?"

"The other option is to check my bag," added the 56-year-old owner of Shainin LLC. "But as soon as you check baggage, you either risk losing it or wait 40-45 minutes for it to come off the plane. I guess you have to decide how much a tube of toothpaste is worth."

Jasmine Boulos, an IT consultant with Accenture, bemoaned the idea of more security checks.

"This happened to us when we had that shoe bomber and they started making us all take off our shoes," said the 29-year-old Berkley resident. "It took forever at first until people got used to it. It stinks. The biggest thing is that now you have to leave your clients early or pad extra time to travel."