

To all concerned:

I am sending this as a "letter to the editor" aviation publications, and to my friends and aviation enthusiasts as a "carbon copy."

The Impact of Terrorism on General Aviation

by Jon Thornburgh
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It goes without saying that the terrorist attack on September 11 will change American society forever. The tragedy cost thousands of lives and billions of dollars, and permanently diminished our national sense of security. It also, no doubt, will result in a considerable loss of personal mobility and privacy as anti-terrorism measures are implemented in the future.

It's a given that it will now take another hour to check in for an airline flight. There will be personal identification requirements, positive matching of bags to each passenger, and hand searches of carry-on luggage. Curbside check-in will be eliminated, and only ticketed passengers will be allowed beyond the security gates.

Soon Federal buildings and public gathering areas will be rimmed by guards, sniff dogs, and metal detectors. Long distance U.S. Postal delivery will take days as mail is transported by land instead of air. Face recognition TV cameras will become commonplace at sports events and airport terminals. Cell phone calls and e-mail will be routinely monitored.

These draconian measures will certainly be debated by powerful interest groups, pro and con. Many of these procedures will be opposed by civil libertarians--probably to no avail. But for better or worse, they will be quietly accepted by the public as necessary intrusions in our lives for the sake of security.

The purpose of this letter is not to discuss the impact of anti-terrorism measures on our daily lives, but to specifically address what the possible ramifications will be on general aviation and light aircraft flying. As an airline pilot, aviation attorney, ultralight and FAA Certified Flight Instructor, airplane owner, and former Naval aviator I feel that I have a broad spectrum of exposure to the various realms of aviation. Based on my experience, I predict the worst.

My intention is to alert aviation enthusiasts to the measures that will soon be proposed against general aviation. Hopefully, an awareness of these tactics will preclude them from being quietly passed into law as we concentrate on other issues in our lives.

Evidence that was recently revealed that some of the terrorist highjackers took civilian flying lessons in the United States will be used as an excuse by militant anti-aviation citizens to call for a ban on civilian flight training. Assuming they are unsuccessful in implementing an outright ban, they will call for background checks for all pilots who apply for a medical. Fingerprinting will be required, as well as psychological exams and blood tests for a DNA bank. The Aviation Medical Examiner will put a hold on your medical certificate because he will have to send the results of your exam to the FAA and the FBI for analysis. There will be a "waiting period" before receiving the medical

certificate, such as we now experience for the purchase of firearms. Medical applications will be denied for security reasons with no justification given.

Anti-airport neighbors will call for airport closures for the sake of security, especially ones located near "sensitive areas," such as military installations. Prohibited flying areas will proliferate, and appear on aviation charts all over the country. Flights will be prohibited for a specified radius around federal buildings, military bases, downtown high-rises, radar facilities, dams, and power generators. Even schools, libraries, and hospitals could be included. Airshows will be banned because a suicidal terrorist pilot could plunge his aircraft into the spectators.

When you arrive at your community airport you will have to go through the same metal detector and bag check as airline passengers--even to fly your own airplane. Pilot I.D. cards will be issued with expiration dates. Even future pilot certificates may be of limited duration.

You will have to file a flight plan for every flight, even touch and gos in the traffic pattern. Prior permission from your FSDO (Flight Standards District Office) will be required before you can fly out of your local area, with an explanation given as to the purpose of your flight. Customs-type inspection centers will be set up for flights between the states. Each state will have an ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone) surrounding it. Random aircraft ramp checks will be routine.

No night flying will be allowed. You must be in continuous radio contact with ATC, and all aircraft must have Mode C transponders. A repeal of FAR Part 103 will ground all ultralight flying, because they are too "unregulated."

Flight instructors will have to turn in "suspicious" students. These will be persons from specified foreign countries, people with tattoos or turbans, people who "ask strange questions," and people who don't "have a valid reason to be flying." Flight schools will have to keep a database of all their students and pilots who rent aircraft, and turn in periodic reports to the FBI.

Pilots will be required to buy millions of dollars of insurance to cover the damage resulting from suicidal acts. They may even have to post a bond before each flight.

And how will the enhanced security measures and bureaucratic paperwork will be funded? By user fees, of course.

I pray that I am overly pessimistic with these predictions, and that we are able to prevent the worse of them from being implemented. But if we are to keep any semblance of the aviation freedoms that we have enjoyed up to now, it will only be due to the diligent monitoring and active political participation of every general aviation pilot.