

Fliers now can rescue prohibited carry-ons

New O'Hare kiosks let passengers store or mail items rejected at security checkpoint

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CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

A Page 1 story and a RedEye story Wednesday about a mail service program for prohibited items at O'Hare International Airport omitted information about where the items can later be picked up. The pickup location for stored items is the UPS store at a hotel, the Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport.

MacKenzie Burnham felt the sting of the carry-on liquid ban at Thanksgiving when she arrived at a security checkpoint in O'Hare International Airport with more than \$100 in beauty supplies that she couldn't take on her flight.

"I got my face cream and perfume thrown away in front of my face," said the 18-year-old student at Lake Forest College. "The guy just chucked it."

O'Hare officials implemented a system this week that gives passengers such as Burnham an alternative to losing expensive or cherished items: kiosks just beyond security checkpoints where they can mail or send to storage prohibited liquids and gels.

Burnham said she gladly would have forked over the \$10 fee to safeguard the bottles until she returned.

Mail Safe Express works by having security officers escort passengers to the kiosks, where they can put their property in bubble-wrap envelopes that can be mailed to an address or sent to a pickup spot at the Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport.

The Chicago Department of Aviation's 60-day pilot program began Monday with six kiosks in three terminals. It had 12 transactions in its first two days. Each kiosk, which accepts only credit cards for payment, has two sizes of envelopes, the larger of which is about 6 inches wide and 10 inches long.

The system should make lines move more smoothly because it will take security officers less time to escort a passenger to a kiosk than the current procedure of entering each prohibited item into a log and confiscating it, said Wendy Abrams, a spokeswoman for the aviation department.

Airport security officers at O'Hare have confiscated about 200,000 containers of toothpaste, shampoo, beverage and other personal items each month since federal regulations went into effect more than two months ago limiting liquids and gels in carry-on bags to 3 ounces, officials said.

In the new system, liquids are sent via UPS at a flat price of \$14 for domestic addresses and \$25 for international mail. Other things, such as cigarette lighters and knives, have shipping costs that range from about \$10 to \$45.

Having something held for pickup at the nearby Hilton costs \$9.99. The passenger must specify

the date and time he or she plans to pick up the property from the hotel, Abrams said. Although there is no time limit for holding something at the Hilton, the city will set one if the program becomes permanent, she said.

The idea for Mail Safe Express came from similar programs at other airports, such as LaGuardia International Airport in New York and Bush International Airport in Houston.

Chicago Aviation Commissioner Nuria Fernandez recently visited Reno-Tahoe International Airport in Nevada to see how its automated system worked.

"Our goal is to provide an alternative for travelers who have mistakenly brought prohibited items with them to the security checkpoints," Fernandez said.

If the mail service works at O'Hare, the program could expand to Midway Airport, officials said.

Scott Stern, a checkpoint supervisor in Terminal 1, said he's glad to have an alternative to offer passengers beyond asking them to toss things away or place them in checked baggage.

"It's a useful option when a person gets irate or doesn't understand the rules," he said.

U.S. Transportation Security Administration guidelines mandate that passengers pack liquids, gels and aerosols in checked bags. They can only be carried aboard a plane if they are in containers of 3 ounces or less and zipped into a 1-quart clear plastic bag.

Stern said he had already helped passengers mail pocketknives and duty-free colognes via the touch-screen kiosks in a process that took less than four minutes. The kiosks are made by Smarte Cart of St. Paul.

The service should not require additional officers at checkpoints, TSA spokeswoman Laura Uselding said.

The service does not increase risks for mail-carrier planes because items banned in the cabins of passenger planes are not necessarily banned as cargo in the belly of aircraft, experts say.

Many passengers at O'Hare on Tuesday had not heard of the program or noticed the kiosks. Airport officials said they were promoting the service by having security officers tell passengers with prohibited items about the option.

Christina Vandercook, 28, a sales manager from Chicago, said she knew the security guidelines and did not bring liquids with her on flights. But she said she would use the service if she accidentally brought expensive makeup in her carry-on.

Others were reluctant to use the kiosks. Dan Peisert, 32, a stock analyst from Chicago, said he would not trust security officials to hold on to expensive goods.

If he arrived at the airport with prohibited items, he would just throw them out and buy new ones later, he said.

"It would just be a hassle," he said of the mail service.

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