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Local airports get ready for federal staff

■ While airports wait for the new federal screeners, added security regulations are being enforced

By Brook Reinhard
Oregon Daily Emerald

Area airports are still struggling to determine how they will be affected by a bill passed Nov. 19 that would federalize airport security workers.

"We don't know when federal staff will arrive," said Steve Johnson, spokesman for the Port of Portland. However, state and federal officials have become increasingly common at both airports. Johnson declined to give specific figures, but added, "We're talking dozens."

Portland's security efforts are being aided by 35 national guardsmen — 25 of whom have been assigned to the airport until April. Although Eugene is a much smaller airport than PDX, it has five guardsmen on assignment.

Mike Coontz, operations manager at the Eugene Airport, said he thinks federal screeners will start arriving within 60 days. The bill requires screeners to replace private employees within one year.

"Within the next few months, we'll see the feds step in," Coontz said.

The bill was passed unanimously by the Senate more than a month ago, but ran into some turbulence in the House. The final bill mandates the hiring of more than 28,000 federal screeners.

Kathy Weatherly, a legislative assistant for Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Eugene, agreed that new screeners won't show up anytime soon.

"There probably won't be new screeners by the new year," she said.

Although actual federal screeners have yet to arrive in either Portland or Eugene, new regulations have already affected passengers. Portland has cordoned off more than 1,100 spaces deemed to be too close to the airport building — the idea is that airports will be less vulnerable to car bombs if vehicles can't park close



How the Federal Aviation Security Bill aims to make air travel safer:

- An undersecretary of transportation will be appointed by the Department of Transportation. This official's sole responsibility will be monitoring the safety of airports and making sure all security measures are followed correctly.

- Within one year, 28,000 federal employees will be hired as baggage screeners to replace the employees of private firms nationwide.

- Within two years, devices for detecting explosives must be installed at every airport.

- The Federal Air Marshall program, which provides for armed guards aboard airplanes, will be expanded.

The bill also increases funding for airport security and allows airports to allocate funds from other areas, such as construction, to make airports safer. Airports with a proven safety record may privatize their security after two years if they meet federal standards.

Photo Illustration Emerald

enough to do any damage.

Eugene has also implemented new parking regulations. The areas closest to the airport have been closed to parking.

"We've had to abandon some of our short-term parking," Coontz said. And at both airports, tow trucks are "aggressively towing" any unattended vehicles.

The biggest headache for both airports is trying to figure out how to comply with the new bill and all its idiosyncrasies. In the last two weeks, more than 460,000 passengers passed through Portland's airport. They were filtered, one by one, through 12 screening lines, and some were stopped and detained for things as trivial as carrying travel scissors.

Johnson wouldn't specify how much money the airport had spent on security in the last two months, but Coontz

said with new security measures, the Eugene airport expects to spend at least one million additional dollars on security this year.

"We don't know for sure what it's going to cost us," Coontz said. But he pointed out that the airport has had unexpected cash outlays of at least \$200,000 for security purposes since Sept. 11.

No matter how much money airports spend on security, the biggest question on everyone's mind is whether passengers will continue to fly.

"By and large, they've taken it well," Coontz said. Last year, the Eugene airport had 390,000 departures. Coontz admits that now departures are down 30 percent from pre-Sept. 11 figures.

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Officials review UO crisis plans

■ Some officials say communication is one area University departments and other agencies need to improve upon in their individual crisis plans

By Eric Martin
Oregon Daily Emerald

University officials are examining the school's crisis plan in order to shore up weaknesses and bolster strengths, after a threatening letter mailed to the school compelled a University employee and five Eugene firefighters to seek medical treatment two weeks ago.

The plan, last updated in 2000, details how hundreds of departments on campus systematically communicate emergencies to their employees and coordinate their efforts with other agencies.

"We realize now that we need to have a little better communication plan with local agencies," said Thomas Hicks, associate director for the Department of Public Safety. "Communication went pretty well within the campus community, but there was some breakdown."

Hicks said it was unclear whether DPS, the first agency called to the scene, was responsible for notifying local law enforcement and health agencies in the event of a campus crisis.

"We need to work on that," Hicks said.

McKenzie-Willamette Hospital officials hadn't heard confirmed reports of the letter until the University employee and the firefighters sought treatment.

When public safety officials meet with local law enforcement and health officials in the near future, they also will attempt to clarify how the chain of command should operate between agencies responding to a crisis such as the Nov. 15 incident.

About 9 a.m. that day, University physics emeritus professor Bernd Crasemann and his assistant opened a letter post-marked from Malaysia and a suspicious white powder spilled out. At 9:23 a.m., Crasemann called the Department of Public Safety, which sent officers to the scene. Eventually, FBI agents and hazardous materials workers responded. The FBI later determined the substance was harmless.

But some still question whether officials made the right decisions to protect physics employees and students, had the letter contained anthrax, and whether those decisions were made in a timely fashion.

"My impression was that they should have closed the door to (Crasemann's office)," said Sasha Tavenner-Kruger, a fourth-year physics graduate student who was working in her office in 271 Willamette, just down the hall from where the letter was received. "That never happened."

Officials ordered employees in offices near Crasemann's office to leave at about noon, said Alexandre Denissov, a third-year physics graduate student. Denissov said the office he shares, 261, was closed at that time.

"I think they handled it pretty well," he said.

But Bonnie Grimm, building manager for the physics

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ASUO cautions student groups to spend incidental fees wisely

■ In the past, a few student groups have failed to follow the fee spending guidelines

By Diane Huber
Oregon Daily Emerald

Two student groups have acknowledged that they misused their annual budgets last spring, and this year, ASUO representatives are ensuring student groups know the guidelines that outline specifically what student groups can and cannot buy with the incidental fee.

The Vietnamese Student Association and MEChA student leaders verified that they have purchased

inappropriate items in the past, but defended their spending and said this year they have a better understanding of the budget guidelines. Money for student groups is allocated from the student incidental fee, which totaled \$2,388,579 last year.

VSA Programs Director Rob Yee said there was an incident last year when a VSA director had purchased something inappropriate. Neither Yee nor VSA Director Phuc Nguyen would confirm what the item was, and last year's director could not be reached.

This year VSA members are better informed of their spending guidelines and the group is "doing

everything by the books," he said.

Nguyen added that ASUO has been very careful this year to make sure student groups don't misuse the fee. He said groups are asked to itemize their purchase orders to prevent misunderstandings on spending before they happen.

"Our accounts were frozen almost all of spring term for only a \$5 product," he said.

According to a June 9, 2001 invoice from Target, MEChA spent about \$50 of \$319.93 on food for their end-of-year Ganas party. MEChA students involved in the Ganas program mentor junior high school students, and every year they

throw an end-of-year party.

Aside from the candy, soda and chips, much of the receipt included purchases of various games, most of which went to the kids in the Ganas program, said MEChA Director David Jaimes. The rest of the games and a set of \$22 golf balls are stored in a cabinet of MEChA's office, Jaimes said.

ASUO accounting coordinator Jennifer Creighton said the most common misuse of the incidental fee is for groups that spend money on food. To avoid this, the controllers usually stamp "this fee is not valid for food service" on each purchase order before students go

off to the store, but the controller had forgotten. The person who had bought the food for the MEChA party said he was unaware of the restriction, Jaimes said.

MEChA paid ASUO back with money from their fundraising account and since then, the group's spending has been fine, Creighton said.

But former ASUO controller Justin Sibley said students should be more aware of how groups spend their money.

"MEChA does not need to be spending students' money on \$22 golf balls," he said.

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