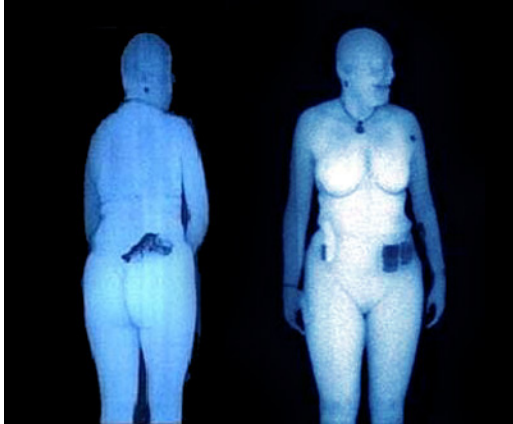


WHOLE BODY IMAGING FAQ

Travel Information • July 2010



Whole Body Imaging scanners produce a three-dimensional image of the passenger's nude body, including breasts, genitals, buttocks, prosthetics, binding materials, and any objects on the person's body, in an attempt to identify contraband. These scanners may out transgender people to TSA staff and potentially subject transgender people to further screening at the airports.

WHAT IS WHOLE BODY IMAGING?

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) defines Whole Body Imaging as “an umbrella term used to describe technologies that enable TSA to detect prohibited items including weapons, explosives and other metallic and non-metallic threat items concealed under layers of clothing without physical contact.” These technologies create a three-dimensional image of the passenger's nude body and any objects found on the person's body. TSA uses this technology to detect contraband, although in a very invasive way.

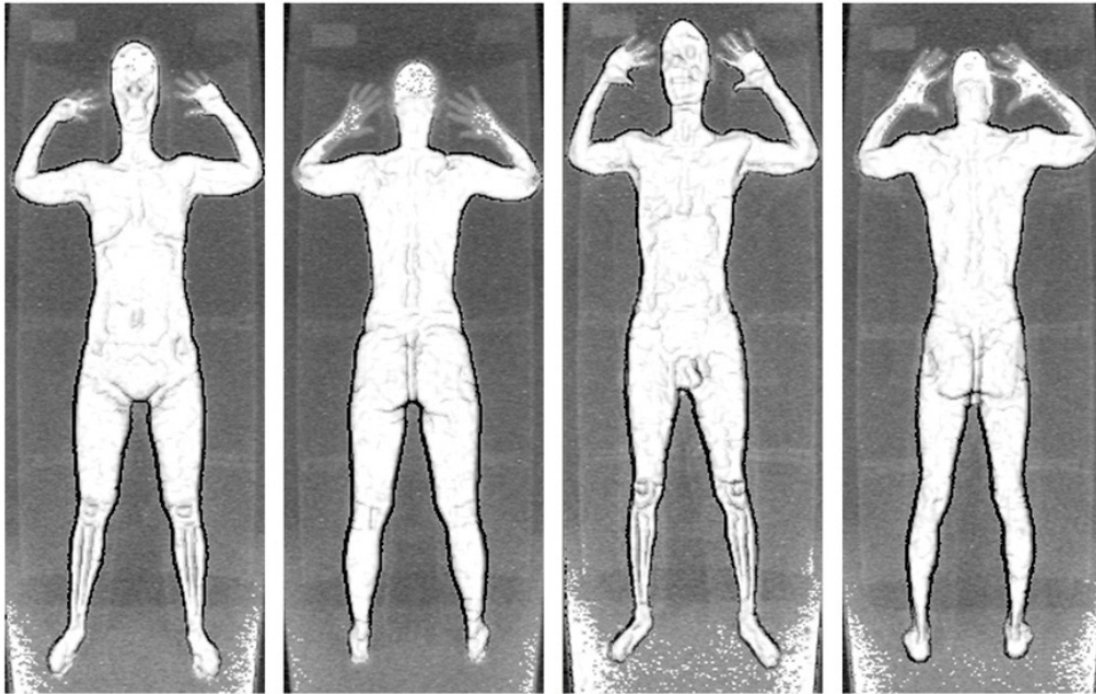
HOW DOES WHOLE BODY IMAGING TECHNOLOGY WORK?

TSA currently uses millimeter wave and backscatter X-ray technology to conduct its full body image scans. Millimeter wave technology directs high speed radio frequency waves at the passenger and interprets the waves after they bounce off the passenger to create a virtual three-dimensional image of the passenger's body and any objects that can be found on their body. The radio frequency is 10,000 times weaker than the radio frequency emitted by a cellular phone. Backscatter machines use low-level X-rays that reflect off of the body to produce a two-sided images of the body's contours and any objects that can be found on the body. According to TSA, a single scan exposes a traveler to radiation comparable to two minutes of flying on an airplane. Both technologies produce a similarly detailed image of the body.

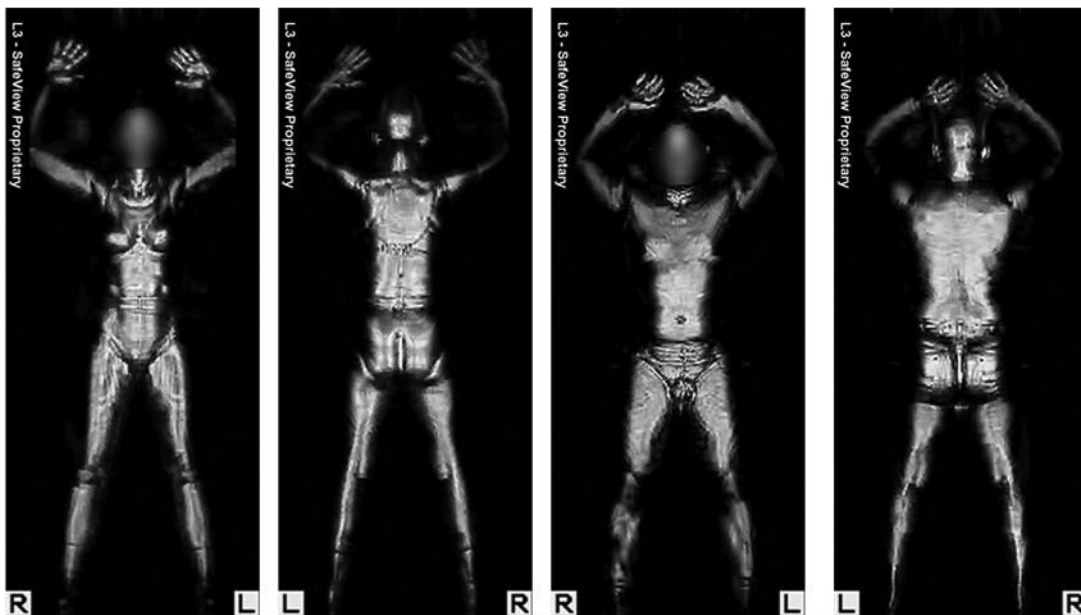
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WHAT WILL THEY BE ABLE TO SEE?

The image produced is an image of the passenger's bodily contours, including breasts, genitals, buttocks, prosthetics, binding materials, and any other objects on the person's body. TSA officers have the capability of zooming in on any area on the person's body. The first image on this page shows a scan produced by TSA's millimeter wave scanner. The second image on this page shows a scan produced by backscatter X-ray scanners, which has been "cloaked" using a computer algorithm. This is how TSA says the machines are set to display at airports. The images on the previous page are unfiltered backscatter images, representing the full capacity of the machine. According to TSA, airport staff do not have access to unfiltered images. As you can see, any of these scans could potentially out a person as transgender.



An image taken with backscatter image technology



A similar image taken with millimeter wave technology

WHAT ABOUT MY PRIVACY?

The images are viewed elsewhere in the airport by a TSA agent in a secure room with no windows. To ensure anonymity, TSA apparently blurs the facial features of passengers when the images are being viewed by calculating where the passenger's face is on the screen and blurring that area. However, the process is reportedly imperfect – sometimes only portions of the face are blurred or it misses the passenger's face altogether. Other body parts are not blurred.

Although the imaging systems that TSA uses are designed for the transmission and storage of images, TSA states that the software capability to capture and store images is intended only for testing purposes and is entirely removed from machines when they are installed at airports. In other words, the images are gone once the traveler has been cleared. Employees are not permitted to bring personal communication devices into the room with them.

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?

The primary concern NCTE has with Whole Body Imaging is the potential for transgender people to be outed to TSA personnel. Although TSA claims that privacy is provided by blurring an individual's face and sequestering those who view the images from passengers, the agents reviewing the images are still required to communicate via two-way radio with the agents interacting with the passengers. The images produced are clear enough to clearly identify one's genitals, breasts, prosthetics, and binding materials. If a transgender person's body looks different from what the TSA agent considers "normal," the passenger may be subjected to further searches and/or humiliation under the auspices of security measures.

Even if TSA creates protocols around the treatment of transgender people and provides that they are not to be singled out for further screening solely on the basis of genitalia or gender nonconformity, the person may still be outed to the TSA personnel through two-way radio communication. Outing transgender people at airports can have profound impacts on employment and physical safety. In larger cities, this may seem relatively harmless because, even if the agent finds out that the person in front of them is transgender, they are unlikely to ever see this passenger again. In smaller cities, passengers often interact with the agents they encounter at the airport in other places in society, such as the grocery store or movie theater.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO AVOID PROBLEMS AT THE AIRPORT?

Currently, Whole Body Imaging is used primarily for passengers who are flagged for further screening after passing through a metal detector. Some airports use Whole Body Imaging for primary screening, in place of metal detectors. The passenger has the option of receiving a full pat down or going through the Whole Body Imaging system. At the start of 2010, TSA had 40 scanners at 19 airports, but planned to install an additional 300 around the country by the end of the year. It is not yet clear how many airports will use Whole Body Imaging for primary screening.

Unless Whole Body Imaging becomes mandatory, opting for a full pat down may be a preferred course of action for some transgender people. Pat downs will inevitably take longer than the Whole Body Imaging process would normally take, and pat downs are not without danger to transgender people; however getting a full pat down may reduce the likelihood that a person is outed as transgender at the airport. Other passengers may feel more comfortable with the Whole Body Imaging, since it may cause less physical discomfort for some people than a pat down.

Under TSA protocols, pat downs, and any other physical screening steps needed to resolve items detected by Whole Body Imaging, should be conducted by someone of the same gender as the gender the traveler is presenting. If an agent is unsure of or makes a mistaken assumption about your gender, we recommend that you politely correct them immediately. You may also request that screening be conducted in a private screening area and that a person traveling with you accompany you, though this may take longer.

Regardless of the form of screening, individuals with removable prostheses or other accessories underneath clothing that may raise questions should consider not wearing these items while flying, if possible. Items with liquid or gelatinous components are especially likely to cause problems. NCTE encourages travelers to make their own decisions, based on what feels most comfortable and safe to them.

NCTE is working in coalition with privacy organizations to ensure that TSA's policies do not cause additional delay or difficulty for transgender travelers, including working to ensure that TSA does not make Whole Body Imaging mandatory.

If you encounter difficulties at the airport because of your perceived gender expression or transgender status, please contact NCTE at 202-903-0112 so that we can work with TSA to prevent the problem from occurring in the future.

** Images are from Newsweek and TSA websites on Whole Body Imaging.*