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TSA Launches "Airside" Security Program for Airports

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The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has launched a new initiative aimed at improving security on the "tarmac" side of federalized airports through improved coordination between airport, airline, and law enforcement stakeholders.

The new Airside Vulnerability Reduction Team is headed by Willie Williams, former chief of police in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, as well as the former head of federal security at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

"By continuing to strengthen the relationships we have with local law enforcement and airline and airport security partners, we can better leverage our existing resources to address potential security threats," Williams said.

Airside security relies on both perimeter and personnel security. To qualify for access to Security Identification Display Areas (SIDA), airport workers must submit fingerprints for a criminal background check.

U.S. airport workers are not, however, subject to universal physical screening upon entry to SIDA areas, as they are at foreign airports including London Heathrow, Amsterdam, and Hong Kong.

In 2006, the TSA launched the Aviation Direct Access Screening Program (ADASP), which subjects workers to random physical screening, as well as screening of their personal affects and any vehicles that access SIDA areas.

Last year, the TSA launched its Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) program. VIPR teams, made up of transportation security officers, federal air marshals, and other federal agents, have deployed at selected transit agencies since 2005 to maintain a visible presence in areas other than TSA-run checkpoints and airline cabins.