

TSA lessens security restrictions on transient pilots

By **AOPA ePublishing Staff**, May 28, 2009

The Transportation Security Administration confirmed that it has a new security directive signed by TSA Acting Administrator Gale Rossides that tones down proposed security restrictions for transient pilots flying into commercial-service airports.

The new directive, called SD-8G, clarifies and corrects some of the issues that AOPA and the GA community objected to in SD-8F. The new directive will go into effect June 1. As AOPA has previously reported, SD-8F would have required pilots based at or flying into commercial-service airports to undergo a background check and receive a security badge in order to continue to have unescorted access to their airports.

According to the new directive, transient pilots who fly into commercial-service airports no longer need to get an airport badge or background check. However, they must remain close to their aircraft, leaving it only to walk to and from the fixed-base operator, service provider, or airport exit. The TSA also has said that it will make provisions for self-fueling operations and grant allowances for emergency situations.

“We’ve worked with the TSA to have transient and after-hours pilots’ concerns addressed,” said Andy Cebula, AOPA executive vice president of government affairs. “With the release of this clarifying document it is critical that this guidance gets distributed and implemented at the local level. We are encouraging the TSA to have the federal security directors at all airports affected by the SD reach out to the airport community to ensure its implementation is as transparent as possible.”

Pilots who are based at commercial-service airports will have to comply with some new rules. If you lease space, like a hangar or tiedown, or are part of a tenant program, you will still need to get a badge in order to have unescorted access to the airport.

But, the good news is that the TSA did leave some wiggle room. The requirement can be waived if the airport operator approves an alternative, such as an escort program.

How do you know if the airports you frequent are considered “commercial service” and need to comply with the new directive? That term refers to more than airports like Chicago’s O’Hare International or New York’s John F. Kennedy International. It also includes certain smaller airports, like Class C and D airports. About 400 airports are affected, but a list has not been

released. AOPA continues to work to obtain a list of those airports.

In the absence of an official list of affected airports, pilots are encouraged to devote some extra time to their preflight planning. Make sure you call ahead to your home and destination airports to get up to speed on the latest security procedures.

AOPA will work with the TSA to address the controversial areas not fixed by the new directive.