



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks  
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.  
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## **"TSA Scanners, Radiation and Cancer"**

Any way you slice it, the more radiation one is exposed to, the higher is their risk of developing cancer. For years, we have been assured that the body scanners used in airports are completely safe and that the technology used was different from x-rays. Well, not so fast. Back in March of 2011, the Transportation Security Administration announced it would retest every full-body X-ray scanner that emits ionizing radiation — 247 machines at 38 airports — after maintenance records on some of the devices showed radiation levels 10 times higher than expected. The TSA's review of maintenance reports, launched Dec. 10, 2010 came only after USA TODAY and lawmakers called for the release of the records. The TSA said it would continue to release results from maintenance tests for the approximately 4,500 X-ray devices at airports nationwide. Those devices include machines that examine checked luggage. Of the reports posted, about a third showed some sort of error. Folks, these are some of the same x-ray machines they herd us through on a daily basis at airports all over America. Because of this investigation, the TSA announced steps to require its maintenance contractors to "retrain personnel involved in conducting and overseeing the radiation survey process." Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said, "The TSA has repeatedly assured me that the machines that emit radiation do not pose a health risk. Nonetheless, if TSA contractors reporting on the radiation levels have done such a poor job, how can airline passengers and crew have confidence in the data used by the TSA to reassure the public?" Collins said, "The records included gross errors about radiation emissions. That is completely unacceptable when it comes to monitoring radiation." The TSA has been guilty of "haphazard oversight, poor record keeping, incompetence and endangering the public." U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz said, "It is totally unacceptable to be bumbling such critical tasks. These people are supposed to be protecting us against terrorists." Additionally, a 2008 report by the worker safety arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the TSA and its maintenance contractors had failed to detect when baggage X-ray machines emitted radiation beyond what regulations allowed. They also failed to take action when some machines had missing or disabled safety features. The full-body scanners, called backscatter devices, are supposed to deliver only a tiny amount of radiation, which the bumbling bureaucracy says is perfectly safe. As of November 2011, reports show there are about 250 x-ray machines still being used as body scanners at 48 airports.

In the America that I love, we should not fear "being fried or zapped" when we and our loved ones go on a flight. Please stop the ongoing governmental incompetence.

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