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References

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Security for train travelers tightened Amtrak checks threat of bomb

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New federal security standards for passenger-rail service take effect tomorrow, only days after a bomb threat stopped two of Amtrak's Acela Express trains heading to Washington.

The new standards are part of the Department of Homeland Security's effort to prevent the kind of train bombings that killed 191 persons March 11 in Madrid.

Beginning tomorrow, rail operators will be required to designate security coordinators and remove trash receptacles, unless they are bomb-resistant or clear plastic containers, said Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson.

Rail agencies also are supposed to use bomb-sniffing dogs to screen baggage, terminals and trains and ask passengers and employees to report unattended property or suspicious behavior.

The FBI put out a bulletin this week to law-enforcement agencies to watch for suicide

bombers. Telltale signs include people wearing heavy coats that could conceal bombs or who bear a chemical smell, the FBI bulletin said. It also warned against bombers disguising themselves as pregnant women or by wearing public service uniforms.

The Homeland Security standards, which were developed in cooperation with transit authorities, apply to Amtrak, commuter rail and subways.

Police stopped two of Amtrak's Acela Express trains headed to Washington late Thursday after an anonymous caller telephoned Baltimore police with a bomb threat.

One train was stopped near Baltimore-Washington International Airport and a second near Philadelphia. Both were searched with bomb-sniffing dogs for about 40 minutes.

"Nothing was found and everything was let go," Amtrak spokeswoman Marcie Golgoski said.

Federal and state agencies are looking into a number of suspicious incidents recently on rail lines along the Northeast Corridor and elsewhere.

The FBI in Philadelphia is investigating the discovery of an infrared sensor last week that was concealed along the track bed of a Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority rail line. It was painted black and embedded in ballast.

The FBI described the sensor as "a commercial motion detector."

"We're trying to determine why it was there and whether there is any forensic evidence that can be picked off of it," FBI spokesman Paul Bresson said.

In another incident, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office sent advisories to law-enforcement personnel telling them of at least seven instances in the last week of unknown people conducting surveillance along rail lines leading into Philadelphia, Trenton and New York.

"People were reported to be videotaping or photographing areas with access to rail lines," said Roger Shatzkin, spokesman for the New Jersey Attorney General's Office. "These kinds of reports are not new. We get them all the time. The only thing that seemed to be new was that we got a cluster of them."

On May 18, a military rocket launcher was discovered by transit workers near an Atlanta rail station.

Although the investigation continues, the FBI said it appeared to be a training model that could not bring down an airplane or destroy a train. The shoulder-fired M-136 AT4 launcher can be bought in many gun stores.

Rail safety has become a higher priority for the federal government since the Madrid bombings.

Earlier this month, the Homeland Security Department began screening rail passengers at the New Carrollton Amtrak station with explosive-detection equipment to test the feasibility of doing the tests nationwide. Beginning June 1, the equipment will be used at Union Station.

The new rail standards are "the first time in the history of mass transit that the federal government has taken the leadership role in setting a federal security standard for passenger rail and mass transit systems," Mr. Hutchinson said.

However, some members of Congress accuse the Bush administration of responding too slowly.

Yesterday, Sen. Thomas R. Carper, Delaware Democrat, sent a letter to the Homeland Security Department saying, "The attacks in Madrid should have been a wake-up call that we need to be doing more to secure our nation's rail lines, but the Bush administration has still not acted to provide the kind of resources we know are necessary to make passengers as safe as they can be."

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