

# A Personal View



expressed by Dominique R. Antonini

“none of the key players are engaged in re-discussing/modifying these rules which should be the case given the fact that they were developed too quickly due to political pressure and therefore without benefiting from a sound technical development process”

The issue of Security Tamper-Evident Bags (STEBs) is still very confusing. One might have assumed that lessons would have been learned from the past when it comes to the introduction of new regulations, but it seems to be a “must” for aviation security legislators to create a painful and costly environment rather than a logical, user-friendly one.

The new requirements imposed by the European Commission (EC), then confirmed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), on Liquids and Gels (LAGs) and STEBs back in 2006 and 2007 are due to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Research on liquid explosive detection equipment is still far from providing us with satisfactory operational solutions; the cost of those systems with potential is simply prohibitive to most of the world’s airports and, even if they were not, the manufacturers would not be capable of feeding all our needs overnight – it would take months, if not years. Accordingly, it will be some time before we think about removing the requirement for our 1-litre Ziploc bags containing tubes of toothpaste, perfumes and personal cosmetics, and the STEBs distributed by airport retailers and airlines when purchasing LAGs.

The situation remains rather confusing for “international multi-leg” passengers as most European airports are using bags which are not, technically speaking, entirely compliant with the requirements imposed on STEBs per se, and most of the LAGs coming from outside Europe are still confiscated during transfer in Europe and this even if proper STEBs are used (with the unique exemption of travellers coming from Singapore for the time being). STEBs were presented as “the” key for removing confiscation during transfer through

Europe, but the reality is slightly different.

Lucky are the European passengers who can purchase LAGs as long as they stay within Europe and come back home within 24 hours, and lucky too are the non-European departing passengers who can purchase LAGs when transferring at European airports, as long as they do not transfer a second time outside Europe during the same journey as they might have their LAGs confiscated at the second point of transfer. Unfortunate however are the other passengers who have to refrain purchasing LAGs at all during travel to avoid potential frustration due to the confusion while implementing these new security measures.

ICAO specifications and EC regulations are imposing a framework which is not properly implemented. At the same time none of the key players are engaged in re-discussing/modifying these rules which should be the case given the fact that they were (rightly or not) developed too quickly due to political pressure and therefore without benefiting from a sound technical development process.

Why are we confronted with a situation where STEB’s of diverse quality are all over the place when it is easy to test and certify them with the objective of verifying their security features against attempts of tampering? Is it really too difficult to make sure that all security bags used worldwide are identical or at least equivalent in quality but also alike in design for easy security inspection? Are their technical specifications and design so rigid that no improvement is possible to make them more secure but also cheaper to produce, thus more cost-effective?

We can recall other security changes, or improvements, which were initially seen as additional painful constraints and

therefore took quite a while before being accepted as baseline security measures by stakeholders. Let’s take as examples the infrastructures’ modifications to ensure proper separation of passengers within terminal buildings or the protection and surveillance of passenger boarding passes and baggage tags at check-in desks in the 90’s. Not forgetting the implementation of the 100% hold baggage screening at the beginning of the current decade, or the reinforced cockpit doors after the tragic events of 11 September 2001. All these additional requirements were initially seen as impossible, or extremely difficult to fulfil, before becoming an integral part of the daily operational security system.

Let’s save energy, time and funds in adopting good STEBs which are indeed essential for the protection of our industry against the potential use of liquid explosives hidden in LAGs and carried by passengers. STEBs are also a facilitation tool during transfer as well as commercial and financial assets for duty free retailers and airports. They are complementary to other security measures or systems such as the use of effective new liquid explosive detection systems, when available, for LAGs and the implementation of the known supplier concept for supplies of LAGs and STEBs by appropriate authorities and airport operators. Let’s use that saved energy, time and funds to cover other security loopholes and counter new threats.

---

*Dominique R. Antonini is the former Chief of Aviation Security at ICAO. He is now Director, Business Development, for AVS&C, an aviation security consultancy company based at Geneva, Switzerland*