

NTEU

The National Treasury Employees Union

June 23, 2009

VIA FACSIMILE AND HAND DELIVERY

Gale D. Rossides
Acting Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 12th Street
Arlington, Virginia 22202-4220

Re: PSE Testing

Dear Ms. Rossides:

I would like to bring to your attention a matter of mutual concern. NTEU has learned that in airports throughout the country there have been massive problems with administration of the current round of Practical Skills Exercise (PSE) Tests. Results of a recent NTEU survey of TSOs on the PSE test found that 70 percent of respondents rated the TSA testing procedures as either "unfair" or "very unfair" (Survey summary attached.)

Our members attribute this to insufficient training of those administering tests and those taking them, unfair testing methods, an inability to verify or question results, and a lack of meaningful remediation. Anecdotal reports of failure rates of 75 and 90 percent at airports are common. Many employees think TSA is engineering failures to lower PASS scores as a method of controlling agency salary and bonus costs. This indicates a serious morale problem.

Some specific problems identified include:

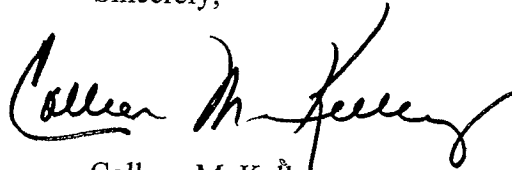
- The TSOs administering the tests are not taking any notes while conducting the tests;
- Because TSOs from one airport test those at another, and vice versa, TSOs worry that they are being failed in retaliation for failures at the test administrators airport;
- There are no overall clear or consistent testing standards;
- TSO are not told precisely why they fail, allegedly because of national security concerns. As one TSO stated: "There is nothing worse than being told you let a bomb on a plane (in a test) and then not being told how it happened so you can avoid it in the future.

- There is no way to challenge test failures; and
- Remediation is token or nonexistent. In some cases, large numbers of TSOs fail the test, are retested within minutes and then pass. This creates the impression they are being failed solely to diminish their PASS rating and save the agency salary costs.

These testing problems are so serious and so prevalent that they undermine the agency's credibility with employees. NTEU believes that the current round of PSE tests should be suspended. All negative impacts associated with failure of these flawed tests should be eradicated. Before TSA resumes any PSE testing, the problems identified above need to be addressed.

Thank you for your understanding and willingness to reschedule our meeting. When we meet, I would appreciate it if we could spend some time at that meeting discussing this issue as well the large issue of collective bargaining rights. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colleen M. Kelley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Colleen M. Kelley
National President

NTEU

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NTEU TSA Survey Results --- 2009 Practical Skills Exam (PSE) Test

This spring, NTEU began receiving reports from TSA Officers nationwide about an extremely high failure rate on the agency's annual Practical Skills Exercise (PSE) test. PSE scores are a key determinate of a TSO's final overall PASS rating. As a result, NTEU developed an online survey to try to determine the approximate TSO failure rate and whether there are any systemic problems with the test.

Here are some important findings:

- Anecdotal reports that give TSO airport failure rates of between 75 and 90 percent.
- The failures appear to be most prevalent in basic skills like wandng, X-ray scans, pat downs and baggage tests.

Specific TSO Concerns:

- Insufficient training of those administering tests and those TSOs taking them;
- Unfair testing standards and methods;
- An inability to verify or question test results; and
- Token remediation.

More than 74 percent of respondents rated TSA testing procedures as either "unfair" or "very unfair."

Quotes:

- "There are limited training aids available to assist the TSOs with recertification and those that do exist show no practical demonstration of the skills required to pass the PSE."—**TSO**
- "We are tested on things we never do on a daily basis."—**TSO**
- "Poor and unknowledgeable supervision is the main reason the PSE failure rate is so high."—**TSO**
- "There is nothing worse than being told you let a bomb onto a plane and then not being told how it happened so as to avoid it in the future."—**TSO**

Possible Solutions:

- Suspend the current round of PSE tests.
- Restrict any negative impacts associated with failure of these flawed tests from final PASS evaluations.

The general sentiment of TSA employees is that management is padding its PSE failure rate to avoid having to pay out fair salaries and bonus money at year's end. This indicates a serious morale problem in the workforce.