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TSA Detecting More Guns at Checkpoints Despite Drastic Reduction in Travel

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WASHINGTON — Transportation Security Administration officers detected firearms in carry-on bags at a rate three times higher this past July than the same month in 2019, though passenger volume is significantly lower, the TSA has announced.

TSA said its officers detected 15.3 guns per million people last month compared to 5.1 guns per million people screened during July 2019. The rate is particularly alarming, given that TSA screened about 75% fewer passengers in July 2020, over the previous year's volume.

"TSA is diligently working to ensure our employees and passengers are safe and secure while traveling during a pandemic, and yet we are noticing a significant increase in loaded firearms coming into checkpoints," said TSA Administrator David Pekoske. "Travelers must understand

that firearms are prohibited items at airports and in the passenger cabins of aircraft. As hard as we are working to mitigate other risks at this time, no one should be introducing new ones.”

The potential Federal civil penalty for an unloaded firearm starts at \$2,050 and it starts at \$4,100 for a loaded gun. The penalty can go up to the current statutory maximum of \$13,669 per violation, depending on the circumstances. A case with substantial aggravating or mitigating factors may result in a sanction amount that falls outside the usual sanction ranges. The complete list of penalties is posted online. (This paragraph has been edited from the original, which stated a current statutory maximum penalty of more than \$10,250. (This clarifies that the maximum penalty could reach \$13,669.)

In addition to financial civil penalties, individuals who violate rules regarding traveling with firearms will have their trusted traveler status and TSA PreCheck™ expedited screening benefits revoked for a period of time. The duration of the disqualification will depend upon the seriousness of the offense and if there is a repeated history of violations, TSA said.

“Even more concerning is that 80 percent of the firearms coming into the checkpoint are loaded and it’s just an accident waiting to happen. Travelers need to know that if they bring a gun to the security checkpoint, regardless of whether it is in a handbag, knapsack, roller-bag or strapped to their belt, it will be an inconvenient and expensive mistake on their part,” Pekoske said.

According to TSA, nationwide last year, 4,432 firearms were discovered in carry-on bags at checkpoints across the country, averaging about 12.1 firearms per day, approximately a 5% increase nationally in firearm discoveries from the total of 4,239 detected in 2018. Eighty-seven percent of firearms detected at checkpoints last year were loaded.

Passengers are permitted to travel with firearms in checked baggage, if they are properly packaged and declared at check-in with the airline. Firearms must be unloaded, packed in a hard-sided case, locked, and packed separately from ammunition. Ammunition and firearm parts, including firearm frames, receivers, clips and magazines are also prohibited in carry-on baggage and must be checked. Any type of replica firearm is prohibited in carry-on baggage and must be transported in checked luggage. Firearm possession laws vary by state and locality; therefore, travelers should familiarize themselves with state and local firearm laws for each point of travel prior to departure.

TSA said it has [details on how](#) to properly travel with a firearm posted on its web site. Airlines may have additional requirements for traveling with firearms and ammunition. Travelers should also contact their airline regarding firearm and ammunition carriage policies.