



One Hundred Tenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

January 8, 2009

The Honorable Kip Hawley
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 22202-4220

Dear Administrator Hawley:

I am writing to express my concerns about the recently issued uniforms to the nation's Transportation Security Officers (TSOs). The Committee on Homeland Security is aware of the TSO workforce's new uniforms and badges¹ -- and encouraged by the initiative's attempt to improve workforce morale. However, recent reports regarding TSOs experiencing negative side effects associated with the wearing of the new uniforms is very troublesome. Reports claim that TSOs have experienced skin rashes, watery eyes, nausea, lightheadedness, and swollen lips as a result of possible exposure to formaldehyde and other irritants in the uniforms. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "There is evidence that some people can develop a sensitivity to formaldehyde. It has also been shown to cause cancer in animals and may cause cancer in humans."²

Although the appearance and ease of care of the new uniforms have received positive feedback from the workforce, these recent reports of skin reactions and other conditions, deserve further attention because it has the potential to degrade working conditions for the employees, affect employee morale, and have a negative impact on employee health.

In order to effectively do their job, it is imperative that the TSO workforce be provided the appropriate tools -- from uniforms to training. To do anything less is troubling and must be remedied. Therefore, I am writing to request that you fully examine and report on the physical reactions by TSOs to the new uniforms and your plans for resolving problems revealed in this examination in a timely, fair, and effective

¹ TSA Press Release, "Transportation Security Officers Have Renewed Focus & New Look on Seventh Anniversary of 9/11," September 11, 2008, <http://www.tsa.gov/press/releases/2008/0911.shtm> (last visited September 23, 2008).

² <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/formalde.html#Health%20Effects>; site last visited on January 7, 2009 at 4:22pm

manner. Additionally, pursuant to Rule X (3)(g) and Rule XI of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, please provide the information requested below:

1) Understanding that VF Solutions is the uniform manufacturer, are the uniforms physically made and packaged in the United States of America? If so, please provide the location. If not, please provide the details as to where they are produced and packaged. If the uniforms are assembled in the United States using fabric from other countries, please indicate the country of origin for this fabric.

2) Please provide copies of all TSA headquarters directives and communications issued to the Federal Security Directors and the workforce to inform the employees of possible reactions and symptoms to the uniforms and ways in which they can address an adverse reaction. Please also provide the date when these directives and communications were issued.

3) Although a 100% cotton shirt alternative is offered to TSOs, please verify that this option is produced and shipped free from formaldehyde and other possibly harmful irritants. Further, if a TSO has purchased a new uniform but has since been diagnosed with a reaction to the new uniform, what arrangements has TSA put in place for refunds and exchanges of old uniforms for the 100% cotton alternative?

4) According to a statement issued by TSA, TSOs who have experienced adverse allergic reactions to these new uniforms have been provided with information on filing workers compensation claims.³ Please provide a narrative explanation of the rationale underlying the decision to give TSOs workers compensation claim information rather than permitting affected TSOs to use administrative leave or other internal remedies. Additionally, if TSOs must take leave for medical appointments related to their exposure to formaldehyde contaminated uniforms, will TSA cover all health related costs for physician visits and prescribed medications?

5) The TSA statement on the TSO uniforms notes that VF Solutions, the uniform manufacturer, submitted shirts for testing to an "independent, third-party laboratory" and that "[t]he material used in the new uniform is industry standard."⁴ Please provide the Committee with the name of the independent third party evaluator, the cost of the third party evaluation and name of the party who paid for the evaluation as well as the *complete* results of this testing. Further, please also provide the industry standards for the uniform and the acceptable limits in the U.S. for all irritants included in the uniform, including formaldehyde.

³ Provided by TSA Office of Legislative Affairs in an electronic mail communication to Committee Staff on January 6, 2009 at 12:28pm.

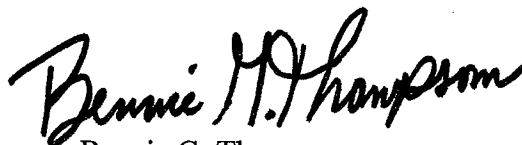
⁴ Id.

6) The TSA statement also notes that “the TSA Office of Occupational Safety, Health and the Environment is working with the Occupational Health and Safety Administration to validate the findings of the VF Solutions testing and is working individually with those transportation security officers that have experienced skin irritation.”⁵ Please explain the actions that the TSA Office of Occupational Safety, Health and the Environment, is empowered to undertake regarding this situation and provide any and all directives, memorandums or other written material concerning their role.

7) While working with OSHA is necessary, I request that TSA also work with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, specifically the National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in order to validate the test findings and formulate a scientific approach to addressing TSO allergic reactions and other symptoms from wearing these uniforms. Please provide a narrative explanation of the rationale underlying the decision to work with OSHA.

Please respond to my questions outlined above in writing no later than January 16, 2009. If you have any questions or concerns about my request, please contact Cherri Branson, Chief Oversight Counsel for the Committee on Homeland Security at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security

⁵ Id.