

## **Would harassment prevention have saved TSA from its PR nosedive?**

By [Robin E. Shea](#) on November 18, 2010

As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, the federal Transportation Security Administration [is under fire](#) for imposing full-body scans or pat-downs on the flying public. Although the agency says that the scans/pat-downs are not intrusive and that the privacy and dignity of travelers is protected, two TSA "HR" stories make that a difficult sell.

The TSA has been embarrassed more than once by internal harassment allegations and its



sometimes lackluster response. Last year, [a TSA employee in Miami physically attacked a co-worker](#) after repeated taunts about his physical attributes that were shown to his co-workers on the scanners. Although the TSA said that it would deal with the employee who, by his own admission, "could not take the jokes any more and just lost [his] mind," it was not clear what would be done about the co-workers' highly inappropriate behavior that provoked him.

From the point of view of the traveling public, this story is revealing on at least two levels: first, it "reveals" how much of a person's body does show on these scans, and second, it "reveals" the mentality of some TSA workers, who will be viewing our bodies or patting us down. If this is the way they treat their co-worker, whom they have to face every day, imagine what they say and do about airline passengers who pass through only once and are never seen again (or are they?).

Then, in January of this year, [TSA workers revealed to CNN](#) that supervisors in Orlando and Tampa were keeping in their office a marker board that made inappropriate references to gay, lesbian, and African-American workers. Although the incident made national news at the time, the TSA apparently failed to follow up on the allegations [until almost seven months later](#), when Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Cal.) made an issue of it after some of the workers complained to his office.

The TSA is a huge agency, and these stories are probably not representative. But they serve as a good reminder to employers of the need to prevent workplace harassment by providing thorough training -- to both management and to employees -- and to immediately correct it when it occurs by providing a response to complaints that is both prompt and effective. Failure to ensure that employees treat each other with respect can result not only in employment claims, but also in public relations disasters

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