

U.S. relaxes air travel carry-on prohibitions

By Jad Mouawad, New York Times

The Transportation Security Administration said on Tuesday that it would allow airplane passengers to bring pocketknives, golf clubs and other sports items aboard in carry-on bags, loosening some of the restrictions created after the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

The agency said the new rules, which align with international standards, would allow its security agents to “better focus their efforts on finding higher-threat items such as explosives.” Box cutters and razor blades are still prohibited in carry-on bags.

Passengers will be permitted to carry pocketknives with blades shorter than 2.36 inches long and 0.5 inches wide. Knives with a locking or fixed blade, or those with a molded grip, will still be prohibited.

The new rules will also allow passengers to bring on board previously banned sports equipment like lacrosse and hockey sticks, pool cues and ski poles, as well as no more than two golf clubs. Novelty and toy baseball bats measuring less than 24 inches, or weighing less than 24 ounces, will be permitted as well.

The new policy was announced by John S. Pistole, the agency’s administrator, at an international aviation safety conference held in Brooklyn. Pistole has sought to move the T.S.A. from a one-size-fits-all model to a more tailored approach that focuses on threats and risks. The agency introduced new programs, for instance, that allow some frequent fliers to go through special safety lines at designated airports if they have been cleared in advance.

The changes, however, attracted sharp criticism from flight attendant unions. The Flight Attendants Union Coalition, which represents five labor groups and 90,000 people, said the decision was "poor and shortsighted."

Stacy K. Martin, president of the Southwest Airlines flight attendants' union, Transport Workers Union Local 556, said that while a small knife posed little threat to pilots locked in the cockpit, the new policy created unnecessary risks for cabin crew. "This policy was designed to make the lives of T.S.A. staff easier, but not make flights safer," she said in a statement.

The new rules take effect April 25.