



Civil liberties preserved with passive screening

Laskey, Mitchel. (2010, January 7). News, Orlando Sentinel.

As a result of the near-tragic events of the attempted terrorist attack on Christmas Day, the increased media coverage has resulted in nonstop discussions about the need for increased security measures, including the wider adoption of full-body imaging and screening technologies.

With the use of such systems, the debate ensues about how this technology, which some describe as “virtual strip searches,” “full-body searches” and “naked scanners,” is a violation of civil rights, human dignity and privacy. The American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations are among the most vocal opponents to these systems.

And rightfully so. These machines are considered to be invasive, as they show anatomical parts in great detail. This raises a plethora of questions: Who is reviewing the images? Do male attendants review men and female attendants view women being screened with the system? What are the additional incremental costs necessitated by this process?

What about children? Are the captured images stored? What if these images were accidentally (or intentionally) posted on the Internet? Clearly, these are all legitimate concerns.

Even for those individuals and organizations who begrudgingly accept these systems as necessary for protection from attempted terrorism or other threats and are willing to undergo the screening process, most people assume that it’s an either-or proposition. They think it’s a fact of life necessitated by the dangerous world in which we now live. They believe we have to live with the compromise between civil liberties and safety.

But this is not the case. With advanced passive millimeter wave technology (the operative word is passive), there is no need to make privacy and safety mutually exclusive.

Passive millimeter wave technology — and the array of security devices built on this platform — currently in use is capable of detecting virtually all forms of metallic and nonmetallic concealed explosives, weapons, and contraband materials carried by a person. It does this without compromising the privacy, dignity or health of either the person being scanned or the person conducting the scanning.

Passive millimeter wave devices emit nothing. Simply put, this technology receives the naturally occurring energy emitted by all humans. Anything that is blocking that energy, such as an object in or underneath a person’s clothing, will be detected and literally pointed out by the system’s detection software. It detects whatever the person is trying to conceal, whether it’s plastic explosives, nonmetallic weapons, liquids, stacks of money or papers, or even stolen merchandise.

These systems are different from active millimeter wave and backscatter systems, which actually do emit potentially harmful radiation and are scrutinized as being invasive because they show the anatomical detail of the scanned subject. Metal detectors obviously do what their name implies — detect metal — which is not enough to detect all threatening items that concern us today.

Only imaging solutions using passive millimeter wave technology can overcome both the limitations and invasiveness of today’s existing systems for a host of real-world reasons: They do not require intrusive searches; they do not require close proximity of the screener to the subject; personal data is not used or compromised; personal privacy is not compromised to any degree whatsoever; health and safety of subjects as well as the security personnel is not an issue since there are no emissions; and it can be used for anyone, of any age, in any condition, including pregnant women and people with pacemakers.

As the dust settles, the finger-pointing stops and cooler heads prevail, passive millimeter wave checkpoint screening and imaging technologies are poised to become the de facto industry standard, making moot the argument between safety and civil rights advocates. These systems are in use today worldwide and are protecting not only people and property — but privacy as well.