

MEDIA RELEASE

AIRPORTS COMPANY SOUTH AFRICA STATEMENT ON BAGGAGE HANDLING

JOHANNESBURG, 28 December 2018 – Airports Company South Africa appreciates that baggage pilfering is much more than an inconvenience for a passenger. It can ruin a business trip or leave a cloud over a holiday journey that should be part of a happy and pleasant break. As with any property crime, baggage pilfering can leave a victim feeling violated.

However, we do have in place strict security protocols and processes. It is also a reality that criminals continually test systems to find opportunities to steal. Sometimes they unfortunately succeed.

During peak holiday travel the number of baggage incidents can increase even though the actual proportion of reports per 1 000 bags handled remains relatively stable.

Managements of our airports will continue to engage with affected stakeholders such as ground handlers, security providers and airlines to adapt and revise security processes.

Airports Company South Africa also appreciates that the travelling public needs to know more about how an airport's systems and processes work.

This is essential because any busy airport anywhere in the world is a complex operation that relies on coordination and collaboration among dozens of role players and service providers.

Worldwide, less than 10% of the people working in an airport are typically direct employees of that airport. At O. R. Tambo International Airport, for example, only 1 400 of the 38 000 people working there are employees of Airports Company South Africa.

It is therefore critical that everyone involved appreciates their own roles and responsibilities in keeping the airport running efficiently. There is no room in this complex set of systems for any single role player to come to the belief that things would be better if they could just do everything themselves.

In addition, some views expressed recently about baggage pilfering suggest that we should set out how baggage handling is coordinated and managed:

1. Baggage handling is the responsibility of airlines who contract ground handling companies to transport bags to and from aircraft. The airlines and these ground handling companies have the responsibility of ensuring security of baggage. This practice is applied across the world's airports.
2. The role of Airports Company South Africa in the first instance is to evaluate ground handling companies and to ensure that they operate according to security and civil aviation regulations.
3. Airlines then select one of the authorised ground handling companies and contract directly with them. Airlines pay fees to the ground handling companies who in turn pay the wages of their employees.
4. A further role of Airports Company South Africa is to provide the baggage handling infrastructure such as conveyor systems, luggage tag scanners and security scanners.
5. Airport security staff apply the regulations in terms of access to restricted areas, which includes real time monitoring by CCTV and other measures that we cannot disclose.
6. Security staff monitor the checked-in baggage security scanners from a remote position that is not near to baggage handlers. Those monitoring security scanners are themselves monitored in real time.
7. When ground handling companies recruit baggage handling staff they are subject to background checks, employment history checks and criminal records checks.
8. Ground handling staff may be subject to polygraph testing where there are reasonable grounds to believe this to be necessary. Baggage handlers are monitored and managed as closely as labour law permits.
9. Ground handling staff are not permitted to take to the airside of the airport cell phones, watches, jewellery or electronic devices.
10. Ground handling staff are subject to security scans going into and out of their work areas. Where deemed necessary by security staff, physical searches are also conducted.
11. Security management monitors and assesses reports of baggage pilferage. Systems and procedures are adapted or changed without warning as part of efforts to combat baggage crime.
12. It is essential that a passenger affected by baggage pilferage report the matter to the airline they used as soon as it is discovered. In addition, it is important to report the matter to the SAPS station at the airport and to get a crime reference number. This is particularly important for insured passengers who wish to make a claim.

13. The essential details of date, approximate time, airline and flight number are vital for airport security to review recordings from CCTV cameras. Not all CCTV cameras on both land side and air side are visible. We would therefore ask that passengers not assume that the pilfering of their bag has not been captured.
14. Most airlines forward their baggage pilferage reports to management of the respective airports which combines the data to establish any trends and whether criminals have found a new way around the systems.
15. Each airport gathers and collates reports of baggage pilfering as part of its standard operating procedure and compiles reports at the end of each month and the end of the year.
16. The standard applied globally for airport baggage incidents is that these should be less than 4 incidents per 1 000 bags handled. Our airports operate well inside that standard, generally in the range of 0.4 to 1 incident per 1 000 bags handled.
17. However, as with other forms of crime, we would urge passengers to take sensible precautions. Most important is to heed the advice of all airlines (carried on their web sites and in their terms and conditions) not to pack valuables such as jewellery, laptops, cameras and other devices in checked-in bags. Following this advice also reduces the potential scale and inconvenience of a loss.
18. The descriptions of items that are stolen are provided to airlines and the SAPS when passengers report baggage pilfering.

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