

Homeopathic Airport Security

Written by Jeffrey Wagg

Wednesday, 11 February 2009 00:00

Reader Ed sends us this tale of frustrating humor:

I attach for your interest an excerpt from a recent complaint letter I wrote to London Stansted Airport after a friend of mine had what she felt was an unnecessarily rude experience at security, where amongst other things she was told she should have checked the airline security pages before travelling. Which she had actually done, with me present (to help as she is not a native English speaker, and a first time air traveller).

I checked the site again to help prepare the complaint, which only added to my ire when I discovered what is stated (in [these FAQs](#) .)

As an aside, I noticed this interesting question on the FAQ: "I need to carry a liquid wig spray. Can I have this in my hand luggage?
Yes, up to 100ml, and it has to be presented in the transparent plastic bag."

I continue with the excerpt from my complaint:

In particular on your security FAQ page: ""Can I carry my homeopathic medication, which is in liquid form, in my hand luggage? Yes, up to 100ml and if this is essential for the trip. Be aware that it will have to be screened by X-ray though."

Notably, essential medication of the conventional variety can be carried in larger quantities. Liquids of any other variety may be carried in quantities less than 100ml. So homeopathic medication cannot be carried in the same quantities as other liquids unless they're essential, which is frankly the funniest thing I've ever heard of in airport security failures, since homeopathic medicine does not work and is completely chemically indistinguishable from plain water (or whatever base substance is used in its "formulation"). I cannot think of a 'medication' that is less of a threat to airport security than something that is not a medication at all.

In short, you're allowed to carry liquids in containers up to 100ml anyway, it seems it's actually under stricter controls than normal (or should I say real) medication (where you can take essential medication in larger quantities) or unsuccussed water (which need not be essential to

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your health).

I was also amused by the warning about X-rays. As http://www.travellingwithchildren.co.uk/acatalog/PG_homeopathicremedies.html tells us X-rays render homeopathic medicines "less effective".

After sending the mail I was naturally concerned that I'd been unfair. Clearly as homeopathic remedies have no beneficial effect, if they're rendered less effective that logically must make them harmful, and perhaps therefore makes them toxic substances that do present more of a security risk than plain water?

Yours in despair,
Ed

As the prevailing theory is that homeopathy "works" by placebo effect, this warning that x-rays may reduce effectiveness is a bit of self-fulfilling prophecy. There was no word on the effects of x-rays on wig spray.

I check the [US TSA site](#) for similar notifications, and the only odd thing I saw was a prohibition on snow globes. In fact, this prohibition makes sense as snow globes are often filled with turpentine, which is highly flammable.

Upon checking the [Canadian site](#) , I observed this specific mention:

Note: Snow globes and like decorations are permitted in carry-on baggage so long as they fit comfortably in one clear, closed and resealable plastic bag with a capacity of no more than **1 litre (1 quart)**

This is rather puzzling, since it is (wisely) not permitted to take aboard a litre of turpentine. Consider the consequences of a large snow globe and a match, both of which are permitted.

And, like their British founders, they also mention homeopathy in this list of permitted items:

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Essential non-prescription medication including liquids and gels such as cough syrup and gel cap type pills, decongestant spray, gel based nutritional homeopathic products, etc.

Interesting wording, eh? "Nutritional" and "homeopathy" really don't go together, as by definition, homeopathic remedies are ultra-dilute and cannot contain nutrition. I think like many, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority lumps herbal remedies in with homeopathy, which is simply wrong. This mislabeling doesn't effect security, but it does make me wonder how much thought is really being put into which items are safe for air travel.

I fly often and understand the need for security, but reading things like this makes me uneasy. If there's any place we need reality-based common sense, it's at airport security. And I fear I can't comment further without flying into a rage.