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ON THE ROAD

## What a Chic New Bag. And X-Ray Friendly, Too.

By [JOE SHARKEY](#)

THE [Transportation Security Administration](#) had planned to brief and train screeners by September to recognize and handle newly designed luggage bags that would enable travelers to keep laptops in their cases at airport security checkpoints.

But that has changed. Because at least one company already has the new bags on the market, the agency accelerated the timetable and will have its officers up to speed by Aug. 16, a spokeswoman for the agency, Ellen Howe, said.

Initially, September had seemed about right. After all, once the agency gave the green light to the concept, various manufacturers needed time to design new “checkpoint friendly” cases that met agency’s specifications and get them into production.

The specifications require a bag design that allows the X-ray equipment to have a clear view of the laptop itself, unobstructed by pockets, flaps or extra gear like power cords.

Several big manufacturers said they expected to have products available by late September or mid-October. So agency officials thought they had until after Labor Day to get ready.

“I guess they underestimated the American entrepreneur,” said Ben Bosma, general manager of a small aviation and travel accessories company, Aerovation Products, in Tipp City, Ohio.

Mr. Bosma’s company, which he operates with his wife, Ginny, already has checkpoint-friendly bags on the market. Mr. Bosma said he has sold (and in some cases given away as promotions) about 1,100 bags.

“It’s very important to be first in the marketplace,” said Mr. Bosma, a former Air Force pilot. Before it joined the rush to produce checkpoint-friendly bags, Aerovation specialized in specialty baseball caps for pilots to wear comfortably under bulky headsets.

The Chinese factory that makes Aerovation’s caps promptly took the designs for the new laptop bags and began turning them out, he said. The bags were snapped up as soon as they arrived in the United States by travelers who did not want to deal with removing laptops from cases and placing them on the X-ray belt at security gates, he said.

It is not laziness that makes travelers want to circumvent the rule, which is right up there with having to remove shoes as a checkpoint irritations. They see their unprotected laptops trundle along the checkpoint belt to be rudely deposited into a pileup at the other end. In the commotion, there is the potential for damage, theft and misplacement.

“I’m extremely paranoid about my laptop when I come to the checkpoint,” said Jim Lahren, the vice president for marketing at Briggs & Riley, a big travel luggage company. Briggs & Riley announced last week that it would be the “first to market” with new laptop bags, which it expects to have available in retail stores on Aug. 15.

But Mr. Bosma’s little company had already quietly claimed the title. Being first, of course, can have a price. Some customers complained to Mr. Bosma that some airport screeners had told them they knew nothing about the new rule and required owners of checkpoint-friendly bags to remove their laptops just like everyone else.

So Mr. Bosma posted a disclaimer on the Aerovation Web site ([www.aerovation.com](http://www.aerovation.com)) that says, in part: “We’ve had customers who’ve been told to remove their laptops from the bag for screening. This isn’t the fault of the bag. T.S.A. is moving as quickly as possible to deploy signage and new standard operating procedures to their screeners.”

Agency officials were amazed that a retailer could get the bags produced so quickly. “We’ll get the word out,” Kip Hawley, director of the agency, told me the other day. The agency is now accelerating training and other procedures to be ready by mid-August.

The bags come in various styles. The most basic design is a protective sleeve that can be slipped out from a carry-on bag. More complex designs include a laptop compartment that unzips and can be folded down flat on the belt.

Most big travel luggage manufacturers are rushing to get new models of checkpoint bags out. Targus, the largest maker of cases for laptops and notebooks, began production in China early last month, and says that the first of its new models will be available by October.

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