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Potential Health Effects of X-ray Security Scanners in EU Airports

Today the European Commission publishes the opinion of the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) on the health effects of security scanners for passenger screening based on X-ray technology (ionising radiation).

The Commission asked the Scientific Committee to examine the impact of X-ray security scanners on human health. Last year the Commission adopted legislation allowing the possible deployment only of security scanners not based on X-rays.

There are two types of X-ray based security scanners: Backscatter and transmission. The Scientific Committee concluded that, in view of the very low doses of X-rays that they use, backscatter scanners are unlikely to cause damage to tissue in the short-term and that the potential cancer risk is likely to remain low. However, security scanners based on transmission X-rays emit much higher doses of radiation. The concern here is that this could result in significantly higher cumulative doses exceeding recommended limits for the public if transmission scanners are used routinely for people who travel frequently.

However, for any use of security scanners using ionising radiation each Member State will have to assess and justify their introduction for passenger screening as required for all X-ray equipment by EURATOM radiation protection legislation.

SCENIHR is an independent group of scientists and their report is not officially approved by the Commission, nor does it bind the Commission in its action.

To read the report please
visit: http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/emerging/docs/scenihr_o_036.pdf

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