



MYTH BUSTING

The Screening Partnership Program (SPP)

March 2026





What is the Screening Partnership Program (SPP)?

// The Screening Partnership Program contracts with qualified screening vendors to provide private security screening under TSA oversight at airports nationwide. //

- TSA Website

Who Participates in SPP?

Airport Customers

20+ commercial airports of varying sizes have participated in the SPP, including:

- San Francisco International (SFO), CAT X
- Kansas City International Airport (MCI) CAT I
- Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC), CAT II
- Glacier Park International Airport (GPI) CAT II

All federalized airports are eligible to apply for SPP. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 gives TSA the authority to approve applications if their approval poses **no detriment to security, cost efficiency, or screening effectiveness.**

Private Vendors

There are currently **27 private screening companies** qualified and approved to provide SPP services under the criteria defined in 49 U.S.C. § 44920, as amended.

SPP uses an **Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity** vehicle to procure and administer security screening contract orders in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulations.



MYTH #1 SPP is subject to government shutdowns

Most of the TSA's workforce is considered essential and is expected to continue working without pay during shutdowns. However, historically, many of these workers call out during shutdowns due to financial limitations, leading to **terminal and line closures and longer security wait times**.

Starting on Valentine's Day the partial shutdown forced ~ 50,000 TSA employees to work without pay. As of March 24, 2026, many TSA officers have resigned, and many have called out sick, causing long security lines. This follows a 43-day shutdown ending November 2025 which also caused TSA employees to work without pay.

The Reality

Contracted staff under the SPP are private employees of TSA's partner companies, not the federal government, and therefore are **not impacted by government shutdowns**. SPP contract employees continue to receive their full pay and benefits, eliminating financially motivated staff shortages and their consequences during shutdowns.

MYTH #2

SPP is Unregulated Privatization.

privatize (v) / prai·vuh·tize /

To transfer a service, company, or industry from public (i.e., government) control or ownership to private.

The Reality

The SPP allows third-party vendors to contract with **TSA to provide security screening staff and services for commercial airports**. The TSA maintains its existing oversight, procedural, budgetary, and regulatory control over all security screening operations at participating airports, including incident management, stakeholder relations, and employee compensation.

Rather than privatization, SPP **commercializes** airport screening, enabling TSA to **augment its federal workforce** with contracted Transportation Security Officers who must undergo the same hiring and training processes, follow the same protocols, and receive the same wages as non-contract staff. **SPP vendors do not own or control airport screening operations.**

MYTH #3

SPP is a Return to Pre-9/11 Security.

BEFORE

Airlines and airports contracted private security companies to conduct airport screening.

Security staff completed approximately 12 hours of training.

Photo ID was not required for domestic flights, and passenger pre-screening was not standard.

About 5% of baggage was screened.

Passengers could bring small blades like box cutters onboard some aircraft.

September 11, 2001

AFTER

The TSA leverages both federal and contract employees to conduct airport security screening.

Security staff are required to complete more than 100 hours of standardized training.

All passengers must present valid photo ID and go through security screening.

100% of baggage is screened for all flights.

Blades of all sizes are only allowed in checked baggage on all flights.

The Reality

SPP contract employees are required to **follow the same current TSA screening procedures, protocols, and standards** enforced nationwide.

MYTH #4

SPP Follows Lower Security and Service Standards.

49 U.S. Code § 44920 (2018)

“The [TSA] shall, to the extent practicable, enter into a contract with a private screening company ... if—

(A) the level of screening services and protection provided at the airport under the contract will be equal to or greater than the level that would be provided at the airport by Federal Government personnel under this chapter...”

The Reality

TSA airport screening partners are required to provide an **equivalent or better level of service** as that which would be provided by federal employees. In fact, because SPP vendors are bound by legal contracts, **SPP employees are generally held to *stricter standards* than TSA employees.**

For example, TSA protocol dictates that additional standard security lanes should be opened if wait times exceed 10 minutes. SPP enforces this protocol through contractual requirements and penalties, whereas the federal workforce lacks a comparable legal incentive to follow this procedure.

MYTH #5

SPP Costs Airports and Airlines More.

The Reality

The SPP is **funded and administered in its entirety by the TSA**, posing no additional costs to airports or airlines for procuring, staffing, managing, and executing security screening contracts.

Additionally, **screening services at airports participating in the SPP cost 15% less** on average than cost estimates for federally provided screening at the same locations; if applied nationally, SPP would have saved taxpayers almost **\$1 billion** in fiscal year 2025.



MYTH #6

SPP Staff are not Compensated as well as TSA Staff.

The Reality

In accordance with the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA), which created the TSA, all SPP screening personnel receive **compensation and benefits equal to or greater than those of their federally employed counterparts.**

Aviation and Transportation Security Act, Pub. L. No. 107-71, § 108, 115 Stat. 611-612 (2001)

“A private screening company is qualified to provide screening services at an airport participating in the [SPP] if the company will ... provide compensation and other benefits to such individuals that are not less than the level of compensation and other benefits provided to such Federal Government personnel in accordance with this chapter.”



MYTH #7

SPP staff are not trained as well as TSA staff .



The Reality

Contractor security personnel are required to follow **the exact same training and certification program**, provided and funded by the TSA, as their federally employed counterparts. This consists of a minimum of **100 hours of basic training** (including 60 hours of on-the-job instruction), administrative training in areas like ethics and information security technology, and annual refresher training.

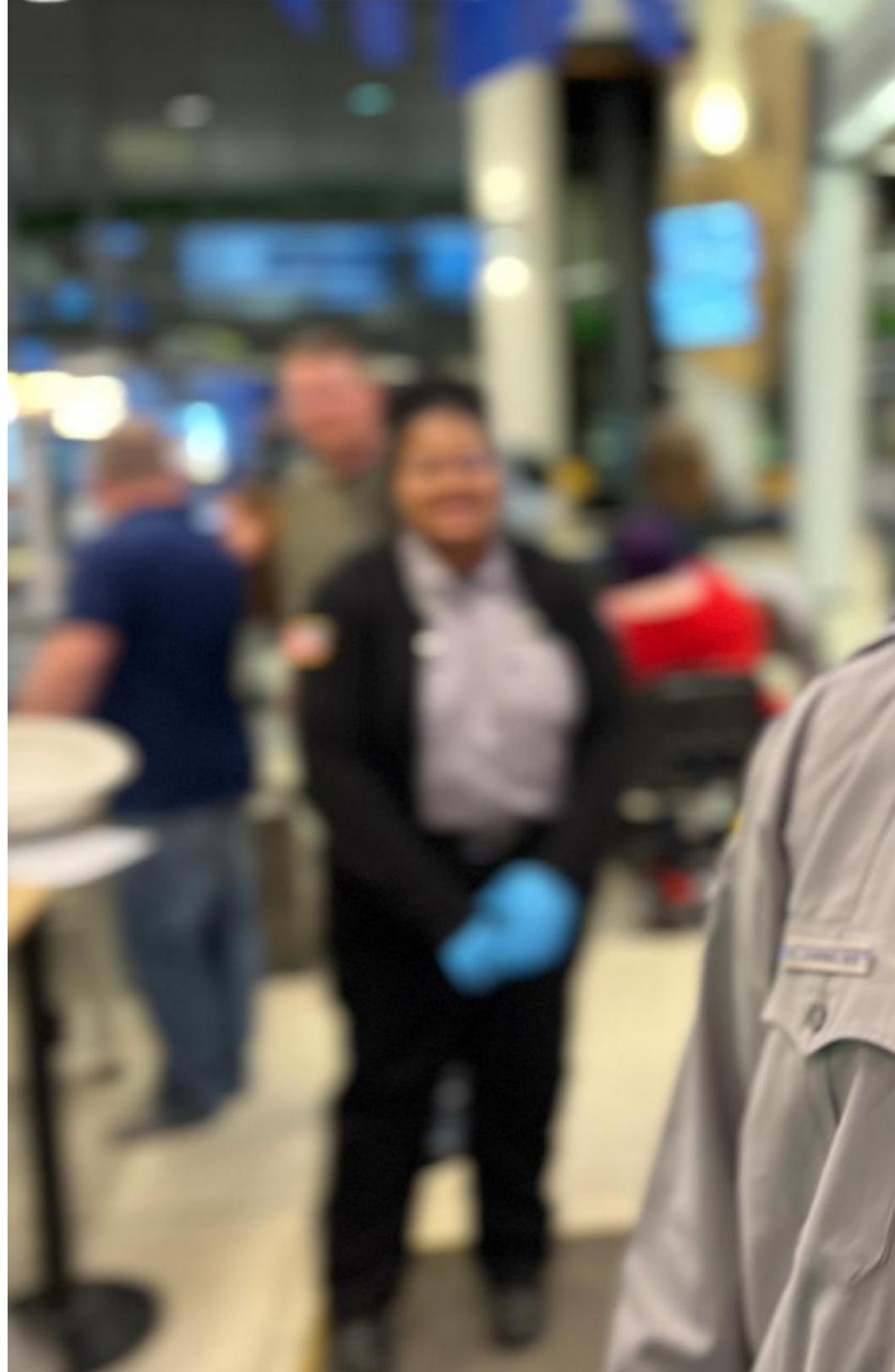
SPP vendors may also provide **additional instruction** for their TSO staff, such as customer service and leadership development training, which enhances screening operations through better communication, professionalism, and community outreach.

MYTH #8

SPP leads to staff cuts

The Reality

Per the Service Contract Act (SCA), SPP vendors assuming airport screening responsibilities from the TSA are required to **give qualified incumbent employees right of first refusal** for their position and with the same or better wages.





MYTH #9

SPP Limits Individual Career Growth

The Reality

SPP contractors have access to the **same professional growth opportunities** as their federally employed counterparts, including developmental, specialized, and cross training and certifications provided by the TSA, and paths into Dual Function, Supervisory, Lead, Expert, Master, and/or Instructor roles.

Private screening partners can also offer **additional career development tools and support**, such as internal trainings, reimbursements for tuition and conferences, and even opportunities to advance to contract program management or corporate roles.

Thank You For Viewing



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