8 airport safety rules

By Ned Levi

What airport safety rules can passengers use for random attacks?

Last week, Esteban Santiago flew from Anchorage to Minneapolis to Ft. Lauderdale on Delta Airlines. Upon deplaning in Fort Lauderdale, he proceeded to baggage claim and picked up his checked bag. He allegedly took a 9mm handgun out of the case in the bag, then fired at travelers in the baggage claim area.

The lone gunman allegedly killed five and wounded six in the airport. About 40 others were injured in the chaos during and after the shooting.

There are airport safety rules travelers can follow to better maintain their safety along with the safety of their traveling companions at the airport, but no safety guarantees are possible.

Situational Awareness

Be aware of your surroundings. Identify potential threats and dangerous situations. Situational awareness is the key to safety protection while traveling anywhere. It's both a state of mind and a skill. Urban dwellers call it using "street smarts," using these airport safety rules' experience, training, knowledge, common sense, and savvy to deal with the potential and real dangers of life.

Reactive Action

If a dangerous situation develops, or you sense you're getting into a difficult or dangerous circumstance, you need to react to it with calculated actions. You can't allow yourself to become frozen with inaction. You can't let yourself get caught up in "analysis paralysis." To help yourself, family and friends, use your situational awareness, devise a plan, and follow it.

Action Plan Options

There are a variety of airport safety rules options for your action plan, some of which require you to act long before arriving at the airport. One recurring concept you will see in my list is to avoid or spend as little time as possible in locations where large numbers of travelers are gathered.

1. Especially when traveling internationally, analyze the

threat level of the airport you're going to fly through or to. One place to gather data is the U.S. State Department Country Specific Information pages.

2. Choose your clothing carefully before departing for the airport. Wear clothing in which you're able to move quickly and safely. Don't wear tight-fitting clothing, high heel or open toe shoes. As it turns out, this concept works perfectly in the event of an airplane emergency and evacuation. You might want to wear natural fibers, too. They generally burn and melt less easily than synthetics in the event of a fire.

3. Whenever possible, print or download your boarding pass in advance. This is especially helpful when you have no checked luggage, as you'll be able to proceed to TSA security immediately after arriving at the airport.

4. Try to stick with carry-on luggage only. It will permit you to walk past and not linger at luggage check-in and avoid baggage claim at the end of your flight, both potential targets considering the large number of travelers congregating in those locations.

Often, using checked luggage is unavoidable. If you must use it, before leaving for the airport, ensure your bag is easily identifiable. I put a brightly colored wide, elastic strap around the girth of my bag, plus colorful identification tags. That way, when I get to baggage claim, I can quickly identify and retrieve my bag, then leave the area.

5. If there's a line at the TSA security checkpoint there is little you can do when others slow the line, but there are some things you can do to get through the line quickly, once you reach the checkpoint.

If you travel internationally, sign up for Global Entry membership, which will enable you to move through

passport control in the U.S. quickly and combined with

its TSA Precheck membership will generally get you through TSA security checkpoints quickly. Alternatively, for domestic-only travel, sign up for TSA Precheck.

Know TSA's rules and regulations so you can follow them closely and avoid secondary inspections of your person and belongings that will slow you down.

6. Scan your fellow travelers, airport and airline employees, and others at the airport. Watch their behavior. In essence, be your own security officer. With practice and experience you'll pick up on who your fellow travelers are and who deserves your continued watchfulness and caution.

7. Scan your surroundings carefully while you move about the airport. Locate niches where you can quickly gain shelter and devise an escape plan from every area in which you find yourself. When you're "stuck" in an area, try to choose a place there where your back is protected from anyone being behind you.

8. You can't be aware of your surroundings or the people around you if your head and attention is buried in your smartphone, tablet, computer, book, etc. If necessary, make scanning your surroundings and the people in the airport a game to stay interested, awake and aware.

If you follow these safety rules of thumb, you can make yourself safer, but if an attack occurs that is similar to the one last week in Ft. Lauderdale, there is no absolute guarantee you'll emerge unscathed.