UK offers $4m fund to detect bombs in electrical devices

The UK Government is today inviting companies and universities to bid for shares in a newly-created £3m ($3.9m) fund aimed at encouraging new technology to detect explosive devices in laptops and electrical devices at airports and beyond.

The UK Department for Transport (DOT) said: “Holidaymakers could be spared the hassle of removing laptops and tablets from hand-luggage when passing through airport security, as government seeks to revolutionise aviation screening.

CONSTANT SEARCH FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY

The DOT says it is hoping that the new fund will inspire companies and universities to take on the challenge with original research to discover new methods of detecting whether electrical items have been tampered with, or appear irregular.

With the primary objective of improving security and the experience for passengers, the DOT says the proposals that it hopes will be forthcoming should focus on either screening electrical items within bags at an airport’s central search area, or more portable technology capable of screening items at other points within passenger journeys.

Commenting on the pro-active initiative, Security Minister, Ben Wallace said: “Aviation security is a government priority and one with an ever-changing threat landscape. We need to embrace and encourage the talent from industry that will allow us to stay several steps ahead of those who wish us harm.”

UK AT FOREFRONT OF RESEARCH

The UK Minister for Aviation Lord Callanan added: “The UK has always been at the forefront of research and development in the field of aviation security. The safety and security of the travelling public will always be our top priority, but we understand that this can sometimes be inconvenient for passengers – especially families with young children.

“As technology improves, we want to make the aviation experience quicker and easier for all holidaymakers.”
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The fund is being run as part of a wider multi-million pound initiative to deliver a step change in aviation security through Future Aviation Security Solutions (FASS).

MORE SOPHISTICATED SCREENING

FASS is a joint Department for Transport and Home Office programme working closely with industry partners to stimulate and fund research into a broad range of potential security innovations, from initial concepts through to commercial products.

This programme has already issued £1.64m ($2.1m) in funding to projects aimed at improving the screening of passengers, their luggage and cargo. The DOT adds that ‘promising results’ were demonstrated at an event in September (2017) as phase two of this research is due to commence shortly.

This Accelerator competition is part of the wider Department for Transport and Home Office Future Aviation Security Solutions (FASS) programme. This aims to invest £25.5m ($33.4m) over a five-year period (2016-2021) to promote innovation and deliver a step change in aviation security.

Security experts have already highlighted the potential dangers of laptop lithium batteries igniting in airport holds and this has now partially led to the call for much better early screening technology for these and other devices.