Iraqi national detained after suspicious items found in LAX search

by Matt Krasnowski

LOS ANGELES - An Iraqi immigrant who was reportedly found with a suspicious device, which he called "therapeutic," in a body cavity was detained at Los Angeles International Airport on Tuesday and a flight to Philadelphia was diverted to Las Vegas because his luggage was onboard.

An FBI official said an initial examination of items found in the body of Fadhel Al-Maliki, 35, of Atlantic City, determined there was no threat but the investigation is continuing. The luggage was examined in Las Vegas and investigators concluded it posed no danger.

Al-Maliki was being held for a possible immigration violation and a mental health evaluation, officials said.

Larry Fetters, security director for the Transportation Security Administration at LAX, said Al-Maliki was selected for a thorough check by screeners at an LAX terminal before 6 a.m.

"The items that were discovered and the manner in which they were secreted on his body were alarming, they were of great concern and initially were thought to be consistent with a threat to aviation," Fetters said.

Ethel McGuire, assistant special agent in charge of the Los Angeles FBI office, acknowledged that what appeared to be wires and a magnet were found in Al-Maliki's body cavity. A source familiar with the investigation said Al-Maliki also had a polished stone, and that he initially told investigators that the devices were therapeutic.

"There was no threat to Los Angeles International Airport, or the airports in Las Vegas or Philadelphia," McGuire said.

The LAX terminal stayed open during the incident and no takeoffs or landings were affected. But a US Airways jet headed for Philadelphia was diverted because Al-Maliki's screened luggage was aboard the plane.

Fetters said the flight was diverted out of an abundance of caution. Officials said 143 people were on board the flight.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimilller said authorities had no information linking Al-Maliki to any terrorist groups. She said it has not been ruled out that the devices were medical.

Al-Maliki is a permanent legal resident who came to the United States in 1994, immigration officials said.

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