

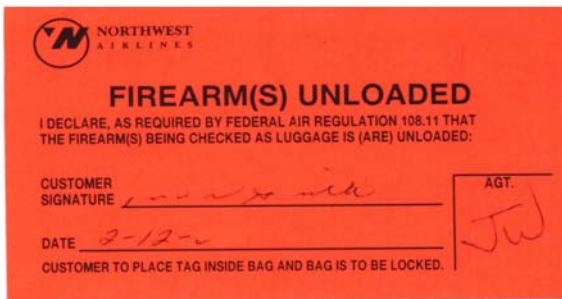
# Airline Travel

## Yes, You Can Take Your Firearm!

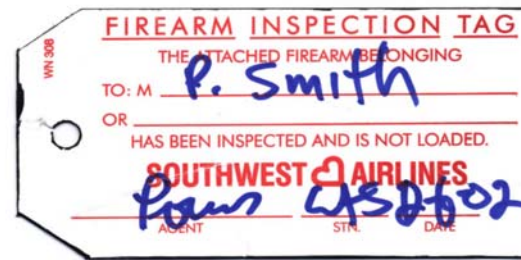
Updated 02/16/04, ©Copyright 2004, Phillip L. Smith

Having just returned from a trip to Las Vegas, Phoenix and Snowflake, Arizona I am pleased to report the so-called increased security at the airports we visited has not made it difficult to take your pistols with you when flying the friendly skies. The purpose of this article is to inform you of problems you may cause from lack of knowledge, not to dissuade you from taking your firearm on a trip; in fact, I encourage self-protection wherever you go. When you see "This I know for sure!" you can rest assured I've been there, done that and have learned the lessons stated first hand.

Of course, the guns must be in your checked luggage and you must declare them at the check-in counter. The check-in employee will give you a "firearms tag" to sign declaring that the firearms are unloaded. Northwest airlines wanted to see the box the pistols were in. Southwest airlines wanted to see the pistol because their firearms tag is attached to the trigger guard of each pistol. Below are tags that each airline gave us to put in our luggage. The orange one is from Northwest airlines and the white tag is from Southwest airlines.



**NORTHWEST AIRLINES**  
**FIREARM(S) UNLOADED**  
I DECLARE, AS REQUIRED BY FEDERAL AIR REGULATION 108.11 THAT THE FIREARM(S) BEING CHECKED AS LUGGAGE IS (ARE) UNLOADED:  
CUSTOMER SIGNATURE [Signature] AGT. [Signature]  
DATE 2-12-04  
CUSTOMER TO PLACE TAG INSIDE BAG AND BAG IS TO BE LOCKED.



**FIREARM INSPECTION TAG**  
THE ATTACHED FIREARM BELONGING TO: M P. Smith  
OR \_\_\_\_\_  
HAS BEEN INSPECTED AND IS NOT LOADED.  
**SOUTHWEST AIRLINES**  
[Signature] ASD002  
AGENT STN. DATE

Traveling with firearms is uneventful if you follow the airlines rules. The rules are basically the same for all airlines and differ mostly in the way the firearm tag is attached and in the amount of live ammo you can take in your luggage. If you go to the airlines website you can see the restrictions for yourself, but here are the basic restrictions:

1. You must **declare** you have firearms in your luggage to the airline ticket agent.
2. The ticket agent will have you fill out and sign a "**firearms tag**". You must put this tag inside the luggage containing the firearm so get your luggage open and ready so you don't slow the check-in line.
3. The firearm **MUST** be **unloaded** and if there is a magazine inserted, the magazine must be **empty**.
4. The firearm **MUST** be stowed in **LOCKABLE luggage** or in a **lockable box** if stowed inside of soft-side luggage. I suggest hard-sided luggage because airlines have a reputation of rough handling. Example: We bought a \$300 Samsonite roller and the airlines broke off the front foot-ledge on the first trip.
5. The restrictions on ammo differ between airlines mostly on the amount you can carry in your luggage. But the licensed CCW typically carries 2 magazines, or 21 rounds which is not a problem with any of the airlines. Your ammo **MUST** be in an ammo box like the **box the ammo came in**. It cannot be in the magazines or loose - the TSA will confiscate it. This I know for sure!

Another suggestion is to buy a couple of those luggage straps, especially the WIDE ones with a combination lock. These luggage straps perform two very important jobs: 1) They provide secondary assurance that your luggage will not open from rough handling, and 2) They provide another means of identifying your luggage as it comes down the conveyor especially if you choose luggage straps in wild colors. We will never forget looking out our plane window in Colorado Springs and seeing underwear, shirts and pants blowing across the tarmac. Thank goodness it wasn't ours but it provided us a reality check about using luggage straps. **LEAVE THE STRAPS OFF OF THE LUGGAGE CONTAINING THE FIREARM AND HAND THE STRAPS TO TSA AND ASK THEM TO PUT THEM ON AND LOCK THEM.** If they are locked on the luggage the TSA will cut them off. This I know for sure!

**DON'T LOCK THE LUGGAGE** since TSA will force it open to inspect it. This I know for sure! Now I give them the luggage keys and wait for them to bring the keys back after they are done snooping.

Airline gate security personnel are now doing random searches at the boarding gates and I can suggest that you not have a knife on your person or in your carry-on bag. This I know for sure! Out of the 6 departures or arrivals on our trip we got searched once and our luggage got x-rayed once. I actually believe that our luggage got x-rayed because we were quite early for our flight and I think the security personnel were training and wanted to see what a real gun would look like inside a suitcase. Except for my comments to the security personnel on what they should do to really stop terrorists, the security searches were uneventful.

It's really not a hassle to take your pistol with you when you fly. Just be aware of the basic rules and your trip will also be uneventful.

One interesting fact, if you are going to visit Las Vegas, is that every parking garage has Security personnel that want to see your drivers license and also want to look in your trunk. We suggest you NOT just pop your trunk but instead get out of the car and go back and unlock the trunk and stay there while the security personnel look around.

Don't stop flying it's the best way to travel. TSA is going to snoop whether or not you take your carry gun with you. It's better to have a gun and not need it than to need a gun and not have it.

**UPDATE 02/16/04: Watch out when flying America West:**

America West has a 50# weight limit instead of 70# as for most other airlines. I am unaware if this policy is by design (to be able to charge you more money), if it is a weight limit because of the type of planes they fly, or some weight limit on their personnel or equipment. But the fact remains, you can still fly with the same weight but it must be in 50 pound or less packages.

On our connecting flight with America West we were given two choices: Buy a duffle bag for \$45 or pay \$50 because our luggage weighed 60 pounds. We asked for a cardboard packing box and were told they did not have any (Northwest has weight limits but will give you a box).

If you fly America West then we suggest you weigh your luggage carefully, or, carry a folding duffle bag in which to unload some of the weight out of your luggage. Otherwise, America West will lighten your wallet by \$50. We have chosen not to fly America West in the future because of this unfortunate experience.