

Sikhs call airport screening for turbans 'security theater'

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Leaders of three Sikh organizations say they've been told by federal transportation officials that turbans will always be searched at U.S. airports, a move that Sikh officials called unnecessary and unfair.

Representatives of the Sikh Coalition, United Sikhs and the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) said the Transportation Security Administration told them that Sikhs can expect a hand wand of their turbans when they go through airport security "100 percent of the time."

The new action would be in addition to procedures where Sikhs enter body imaging scanners or pat down their own turbans and have their hands checked for traces of chemicals.

"Blindly singling out turbans when any other piece of clothing is as capable of hiding explosives is unsafe and un-American," said Amardeep Singh, program director of the New York-based Sikh Coalition in a statement.

"While forcing turbaned Sikhs to go through an extra pat down may make people feel safer it doesn't actually make anyone safer. This is security theater at its worst."

TSA spokeswoman Sterling Payne told The New York Times she would not comment on the Sikh's claims.

"Removal of all headwear is recommended, but the rules accommodate those with religious, medical or other reasons for which the passenger wishes not to remove the item," she said. "If the officer cannot

reasonably determine that the clothing or head covering is free of a threat item, individuals will be referred for additional screening."