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Airport body scanners safe for public and aircrew

Airport body scanners are safe, and the public should be informed and reassured regarding their use. Those are the findings published today, Friday 03 June 2011, in a report, *Airport Security Scanners & Ionising Radiation*, from a working group of The Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) and the British Institute of Radiology (BIR).

The group reviewed the published literature on the two types of body scanner currently being tested in the UK and abroad:

- the backscatter x-ray scanner is the system currently being appraised in the UK; this emits very low levels of ionising radiation. The group observed that the average dose from a single scan is 100,000 times lower than the average annual dose of radiation a person receives from natural background radiation and medical sources.
- the millimetre wave scanner; this uses radiowave frequencies rather than ionising radiation and is currently being trialled at some airports in France. Both systems are in use in the United States.

Dr Peter Riley, a Consultant Radiologist and Chair of the Working Group and the BIR's Radiation Protection Committee, said, "All available data suggests that the radiation doses for air travellers and aircrew from airport scanners are tiny. Such doses are only a small fraction of the exposure those same travellers will receive from cosmic radiation as they fly at 30,000 feet. In medicine, the small risk to health from diagnostic doses of radiation is offset by the quantifiable benefits of early diagnosis and treatment; in the airport context, the benefit is one of higher travel security."

Dr Tony Nicholson, Dean of the RCR's Faculty of Clinical Radiology, "Both passengers, and airport and airline workers, have the right to be informed about the levels of radiation they are exposed to. However, they should be reassured that these levels are very low indeed, and are well regulated in the UK, being subject to the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1999, enforced by the Health and Safety Executive."

Notes to Editors

1. For further information, or to request a copy of the report, *Airport Security Scanners & Ionising Radiation: Report of BIR Short Life Working Group*, please contact Dan Garbutt, RCR Communications Officer, 020 7299 1138 (direct line) or dan_garbutt@rcr.ac.uk

2. The working group was made up of representatives from the RCR, the BIR, and relevant UK advisory and regulatory bodies. The remit of the group was to review the available published literature regarding radiation dose produced by airport security scanners, and assess the radiation safety issues raised by air travellers, airline and airport staff and some professionals working within the field of diagnostic radiology.

3. The British Institute of Radiology (www.bir.org.uk) is an independent multidisciplinary organisation, a registered charity and the world's oldest radiological society. It aims to share knowledge and educate the public, thereby improving prevention and detection of disease, and management and treatment of patients. Its membership is open to everyone with a professional interest in radiology and radiation oncology.

5. The Royal College of Radiologists (www.rcr.ac.uk) has approximately 8600 members and Fellows worldwide representing the disciplines of clinical oncology and clinical radiology. All members and Fellows of the College are registered medical or dental practitioners. The RCR exists to advance the science and practice of clinical radiology and clinical oncology through a range of activities, including setting and maintaining the standards for entry to, and practise in, the specialties of clinical radiology and clinical oncology, and arrangements for continuing professional development (CPD) in both specialties.