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Brought a banned item to O'Hare? Ship it back home

By Lorene Yue

Dec. 12, 2006

(Crain's) — Travelers tired of tossing out prohibited personal items confiscated at O'Hare International Airport's security checkpoints now can hang onto them for a fee, though not on the plane.

Six shipping kiosks called Mail Safe Express were installed Monday in terminals 1, 2 and 3 that allow passengers to mail their banned belongings. Travelers also can put items into the kiosks that they want to pick up upon their return.

"It's a pilot program and depending on how successful it is, we hope to expand it to Midway International Airport," said Wendy Abrams, spokeswoman for Chicago's Department of Aviation. "We think it's a great idea and we hope it will really take off."

Once travelers have cleared the security checkpoint, any passengers with prohibited items — such as more than 3 ounces each of a liquid, gel or aerosol — can be escorted by a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer to one of the shipping kiosks, where they can place their items in a 10.5-by-2-inch bag and use a credit card to pay shipping costs and a fee.

Cigarette lighters and liquids are assessed a flat domestic shipping fee of \$25 and \$14, respectively, for each envelope. Other items cost \$8.95 plus postage. International rates are \$45 for cigarette lighters, \$25 for liquids and \$15.95 for all other non-hazardous items.

Travelers who check their items for \$9.99 per envelope can retrieve them from the Hilton hotel at O'Hare, Ms. Abrams said.

The idea to offer the Mail Safe Express service came when Aviation Commissioner Nuria Fernandez saw them installed at Reno/Tahoe International Airport.

Federal security officials said travelers are still bringing banned items through security checkpoints despite attempts to inform passengers of what is permissible.

"We're still seeing about 200,000 prohibited items a month at O'Hare," said Laura Uselding, a spokeswoman for the TSA. "This is now another option."