

Sex toys, hand grenades and £10,000 runaway cats – Heathrow staff reveal secrets



GMB members reveal their strangest moments as they keep the millions safe

Super guns, sex toys and septuagenarian strippers – being a security guard at the world's biggest airport is a very challenging job.

GMB members work their socks off keeping the millions of people who use Heathrow Airport safe – often putting their own lives at risk, not to mention dealing with some truly absurd moments.



Following GMB's long-running campaign, Heathrow has now announced all contracted staff working at the airport will be paid the London Living Wage of £10.55 per hour by 2020

Now GMB is urging the airport to make sure all staff – including contractors – are paid at least the London Living Wage.

As part of the campaign, two security guards lift the lid on what life is like behind the scenes at Heathrow.



Smuggling Sex Toys

"A while ago we had a supervisor – she wasn't very popular. A real stickler for procedure who would never ask you nicely. She had this script for asking people about electrical items in people's luggage, and woe betide you if you didn't stick to it.

"A few months after she left, she came back to the airport on her holidays.

"We asked her 'have you got any electrical items in your bag?' Her face fell. So we took her to one side and asked her what it was.

"Very reluctantly, she reached in her bag and pulled on this huge rubber penis.

"It was huge. It must have been 15 inches long, ribbed and it's wobbling around everywhere.

"She looked like she wanted the ground to swallow her up.

"But we did what she's always taught us – stick to the script; 'Is this yours?' 'Yes' Have you maintained it yourself?' 'Yes' 'Have you lent it to anyone?'

"At least she said no to that one"





cat

£10,000 Runaway Feline

“My second day on the job I was dealing with pet transfers. One of the pets we were moving was a £10,000 Siamese cat that had just won a cat show.

“Suddenly the box flew open and this cat was out like a shot. I tried to grab but it was off. I ran after it and some of my colleagues joined in.

“Before long there were 25 of us racing round the airport trying to get this cat. It took us three hours hunting it down across the terminal before someone tempted it with some milk and we could grab it.

“But it’s shame because a lot of people send their pets in boxes in the hold. Many, many people forget to put air holes in and the pet dies.

“The pilot is supposed to put the heating on but they don’t always remember. You end up with a dog lollipop because it’s so cold.”



grenade



Live hand grenade evacuation

"I used to work in working in military and diplomatic post – which goes in the hold of passenger planes.

"People used to send a lot of spoils of war from Iraq. You wouldn't believe it; Iraqi handguns, bags of C4 explosives, that kind of thing.

"Someone even sent a belt of live grenades – I mean a full belt, Rambo style, where all the pins are attached to one string.

"One of them was very, very loose – it could have gone off at any minute. And these were meant to go in the hold of a civilian plane.

"It was pretty tense. We had to evacuate the entire building while the bomb squad came. Terminal three was shut for about for three hours.

"SO 18 and the bomb squad turned up – but they make you go back into the building to show them what you've seen. I was terrified."



stripper

Septuagenarian strippers

I was working at the on the scanners, asking people to put their belongings in a tray. A woman – who must have been in her 70s – turned up at security in a big jacket.

So I asked her to put her shoes and jacket in the tray before walking through the scanner.

Looking back, I don't think she can have spoken much English, because when I turned around she was stark naked. She'd taken literally everything off. Not a stitch on her – it was all in her tray."



Karachi Super Gun

“Another time we found parts of a long range sniper rifle that was being sent to Karachi. This was a custom-made, high velocity deadly bit of kit.

“We got in touch with US homeland security and they decided to let the weapon travel. They wanted to track where it was going and try to shut down the terrorist cell.

“It was all hushed up at the time but it was a long while ago now so hopefully we are allowed to talk about it.



booze

Drunken antics

“One chap was putting his things in the tray, but when he put his shoes up he said ‘be careful, my shoes will explode.’

“Obviously we went into full security mode, the police came and this guy was arrested and handcuffed.

“But there was nothing wrong with the shoes – they were just normal. We asked him ‘why did you say what you said?’

“He told us he had been sent by Scotland Yard to test out how tight our security was.

“It wasn’t true. He was drunk as a skunk.”

Nadine Houghton, GMB National Officer, said:

“Whilst GMB members stories are undoubtedly funny, the reality is that it is our members who are on the front line of making sure Heathrow operates safely and securely.



"It is all too easy to forget the terminal cleaners, the security guards and the ticket agents but these roles are just as important as the pilots and cabin crew staff to a passengers' journey.

"As such, these roles deserve to be paid accordingly. That is why the GMB has campaigned to ensure these groups of staff are paid the London Living Wage at Heathrow and whilst we welcome Heathrow Airport Limited's commitment to achieving this, we won't rest until we see that money in our members' pockets."

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