

# New high-tech scanners to boost port security

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Two out of four newly acquired Smiths Detection heavy commercial vehicle scanners have officially been introduced to improve efficiency and security at the nation's ports. The commissioning ceremony occurred yesterday at the Port of Port-of-Spain, with the remaining two set to be installed at the Port of Point Lisas.

Finance Minister Colm Imbert led the ribbon-cutting ceremony, joined by Works and Transport Minister Rohan Sinanan, Port Authority chairman Lyle Alexander, and acting Comptroller of the Customs and Excise Division, Riad Juman.

According to Imbert, the scanners, which cost of US\$12.9 million (TT\$87 million), will enhance the detection of illegal contraband, narcotics, and weapons.

He said the new scanners significantly improve efficiency, processing up to 25 containers per hour, compared to the previous fixed scanner, which could handle only 60 containers per day.

"These x-ray screening systems are designed for ease of operation and, at full capacity, can scan up to 25 container trucks per hour in mobile scanning mode and up to 100 trucks per hour in passthrough mode," Imbert said.

The scanners should facilitate rapid threat identification without manual inspections, better support trade, provide real-time analysis, and offer flexible deployment due to their mobility.

Imbert also highlighted the scanner's high penetration capability, noting that it can scan through 300 millimetres (12 inches) of steel, distinguishing organic and inorganic materials with adjustable scanning heights, angles, and multiple scanning modes.

While Sinanan stated the Government's goal is to scan 75 per cent of all containers to align with international standards, Juman said the aim is to reach 100 per cent of containers. To address health and safety concerns—particularly worries that radiation exposure may affect male fertility—a specialised radiation committee will be established.

This committee will be chaired by the Ministry of Health's radiation protection officer and will include a radiation safety officer stationed at the port along with customs officials.

"This is one of the reasons for that committee, to make sure everybody's safe. I can't say if the union might, in the future, want to make some objection, but right now there is no issue whatsoever," Imbert said.

Each scanner will be operated by two people plus a driver, or just two people in remote settings.

Meanwhile, the finance minister does not anticipate sabotage of the equipment.

"This is going to be handed over to the Revenue Authority, and I certainly hope that they would have proper safeguards in place. I don't think there'll be sabotage."

As for maintenance, the supplier has been contracted to maintain the equipment and train customs

workers. Once the contract expires, customs officials will take over maintenance duties.

While the business community welcomes greater efficiency, the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA) has expressed frustration over what it calls unfair suspicion of business owners importing contraband.

DOMA president Gregory Aboud argued that the influx of illegal items is due to porous borders, not container shipments.

He pointed out that the 25,000 missing rounds of ammunition from the Defence Force did not enter through business owners' containers.

"We understand the need to scan all these containers, we have no problem with it. But you are scanning containers of powdered milk, rice, and Chinese-manufactured goods, devoting resources that seem misallocated when guns and ammunition are coming from official sources," Aboud said. He urged authorities to focus on border security and safeguarding ammunition storage facilities instead.

Imbert added that the scanners at Point Lisas will be commissioned in due course.