

From the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin Online News.

Posted on Friday, January 13, 2012

Airline puts emphasis on passenger arrival time to WW airport

VICKI HILLHOUSE

WALLA WALLA UNION-BULLETIN

WALLA WALLA -- Few inconveniences of flying can top arriving at your destination without your luggage.

That's why local airline officials are encouraging passengers on Walla Walla's two daily flights to Seattle to check in early.

Starting Jan. 18, Alaska Air Group will streamline its service on subsidiaries Horizon Air and Alaska Airlines. As part of that process, the cutoff time for checked baggage will change, said Greg Sullivan, Horizon's local customer services manager.

Though airline officials have long encouraged passengers to arrive 60-90 minutes early for their flights, some travelers continue to show up 20 or 30 minutes before takeoff. With some scrambling, security and airline employees can usually accommodate them.

But a new challenge is arising, Sullivan said. "It's the bags that are the issue lately."

He said Alaska Airlines wants checked bags to be turned over no later than 40 minutes before takeoff. Checked baggage will still be accepted after that, but the chances of the bags arriving at the destination on time are reduced.

"This isn't just a Walla Walla issue," added Walla Walla Regional Airport Manager Jennifer Skoglund. "This is across their whole system. I think the central theme is they just want people to make sure they check in at the proper times."

Every checked bag is opened and examined for security by TSA employees, she said. The later passengers arrive, the less time TSA employees have to process the bags, creating the obstacle.

"We just need to keep getting the message out," Skoglund said. "Even though we are a small airport, we need to follow all the regulations, and we encourage people to get to the airport on time."

Vicki Hillhouse can be reached at vickihillhouse@wwub.com or 526-8321.