IT TAKES AN ATTEMPTED TERRORIST ATTACK TO ACTUALLY TEST BACKSCATTER MACHINES

Long after rolling out backscatter machines without proving their efficacy and safety, it looks like the machines will finally be tested. As the AP reports, the government is now testing the underwear bomb Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula planned to use to conduct an Osama bin Laden death anniversary attack to see whether it would have gotten by airport security.

> The FBI is examining the latest bomb to see whether it could have passed through airport security and brought down an airplane, officials said. They said the device did not contain metal, meaning it probably could have passed through an airport metal detector. But it was not clear whether new body scanners used in many airports would have detected it.

If the machines wouldn't have stopped the attack (note, the terrorist had not yet bought a ticket, so it's not even clear which airports they'd be testing), then we can just take solace in the fact that Michael Chertoff will have a nice comfy retirement. If they would have, then the TSA will feel justified in all the gate grope they've been engaging in for years.

Of course, the real lesson is that we'd be better off relying on good intelligence to stop an attack—as it stopped this one—long before a terrorist gets caught at the gate.