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## Seattle airport removes Christmas trees to avoid lawsuit

**SEATAC, Washington** (AP) -- All nine Christmas trees have been removed from the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport instead of adding a giant Jewish menorah to the holiday display as a rabbi had requested.

Maintenance workers boxed up the trees during the graveyard shift early Saturday, when airport bosses believed few people would notice.

"We decided to take the trees down because we didn't want to be exclusive," said airport spokeswoman Terri-Ann Betancourt. "We're trying to be thoughtful and respectful, and will review policies after the first of the year."

Rabbi Elazar Bogomilsky, who made his request weeks ago, said he was appalled by the decision. He had hired a lawyer and threatened to sue if the Port of Seattle didn't add the menorah next to the trees, which had been festooned with red ribbons and bows.

"Everyone should have their spirit of the holiday. For many people the trees are the spirit of the holidays, and adding a menorah adds light to the season," said Bogomilsky, who works in Seattle at the regional headquarters for Chabad Lubavitch, a Jewish education foundation.

After consulting with lawyers, port staff believed that adding the menorah would have required adding symbols for other religions and cultures in the Northwest. The holidays are the busiest season at the airport, Betancourt said, and staff didn't have time to play cultural anthropologists.

Hanukkah begins this Friday at sundown.

"They've darkened the hall instead of turning the lights up," said Bogomilsky's lawyer, Harvey Grad. "There is a concern here that the Jewish community will be portrayed as the Grinch."

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