

New travel document requirements to take effect

Are you planning a trip to the United States? Then you should know that as of January 23, 2007, everybody, including U.S. citizens, traveling by air into the U.S. will be required to present a valid passport or other accepted travel document. This applies to passengers traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda; children and infants are included.

All U.S. entrants

This travel initiative, known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative or WHTI, will ultimately affect all United States citizens entering or re-entering the United States by air, sea and land. It will also affect certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States by air or sea. This includes most Canadian citizens and citizens of Bermuda and Mexico.

U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) are exempt from the passport requirement but must present one of the following: I-551 Permanent Resident Card; a machine-readable immigrant visa endorsed with a CBP admission stamp; a temporary residence stamp (ADIT stamp) contained in a passport or on a Form I-94; a valid reentry permit; or an unexpired immigrant visa.

The requirement comes from the Departments of State and Homeland Security, as directed by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. That act requires them to put into place a plan that requires all travelers to present documentation that shows identity and citizenship when entering the United States.

Phases

The initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible.

- By January 23, 2007, it will be applied to all air travel from within the Western Hemisphere for citizens of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Bermuda
- As early as January 1, 2008, it will be applied to all Western Hemisphere travel including sea and land border travel

Ultimately, the goal is to keep America's borders safer by requiring travelers to provide standardized, secure and reliable documentation that will allow the Department of Homeland Security to quickly, reliably and accurately identify a traveler.

Alternatives

What can you use if you don't have or want to bring your passport along on your short journey? One alternative travel document is the NEXUS Air card, for which enrollment is limited to citizens of Canada and the United States, lawful permanent residents of the United States and permanent residents of Canada. It requires a background check for issuance.

Another is the Merchant Mariner's Document or "z-card" issued by the U.S. Coast Guard to merchant mariners.

As proposed, members of the U.S. Armed Forces on active duty traveling on orders will continue to be exempt from the passport requirement.

People who apply for entry without appropriate documentation will be referred for secondary screening. In secondary, CBP officers will evaluate any evidence of citizenship or identity the individual may have and will verify all information against available databases. This is expected to result in delays in the individual's travel. So it is highly encouraged that all U.S. citizens obtain a passport to help minimize any holdup.

WHTI acceptable documents

- **Yes:** Passport, Merchant Mariner's Document (Z-Card), NEXUS Air card, U.S. Permanent Resident Card
- **No:** Driver's license, birth certificate, library cards, voter registration cards, etc.

New passport regulations to affect infant travel

Infants could cross into U.S. borders with a birth certificate instead of a passport. On January 23, 2007, U.S. citizens and non-immigrant aliens, of every age, traveling by **air** into the United States will be required to present a valid passport or alternative travel document.

Even passengers traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda will be required to present a valid passport or other accepted travel document.

U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) must provide one of the following in addition to a valid passport: I-551 Permanent Resident Card; a machine-readable immigrant visa endorsed with a CBP admission stamp; a temporary residence stamp (ADIT stamp) contained in a passport or on a Form I-94; a valid reentry permit; or an unexpired immigrant visa.

The requirement comes from the U.S. State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. They are jointly required by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to enact a plan that requires all travelers to present secure documentation that shows identity and citizenship when entering the United States.

The goal, of course, is to keep America's borders safer. To reach this goal, travelers will be required to provide standardized, secure and reliable documentation that will allow the Department of Homeland Security to quickly, reliably and accurately identify a traveler and determine his or her admissibility.

Members of the U.S. Armed Forces on active duty traveling on orders will continue to be exempt from the passport requirement.

For more information, contact the Department of State (www.state.gov) or U.S. Customs and Border Protection of the Department of Homeland Security (www.cbp.gov).