



NEWS

United States Consulate General

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WESTERN HEMISPHERE TRAVEL INITIATIVE FORMALLY SUBMITTED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Initiative Designed to Expedite Travel in the Western Hemisphere While Enhancing Security

Washington, D.C. – The Departments of Homeland Security and State formally submitted the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative proposal for public comment. The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require all U.S. citizens, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, and citizens of Canada and Mexico to have a passport or other accepted secure document that establishes the bearer's identity and nationality to enter or re-enter the United States by January 1, 2008.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 mandated that the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, develop and implement a plan to require U.S. citizens and foreign nationals to present a passport, or other secure document when entering the United States.

In the proposed implementation plan, the Initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline will be as follows:

- **December 31, 2006** – Requirement applied to all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.
- **December 31, 2007** – Requirement extended to all land border crossings as well as air and sea travel.

In April 2005, the Departments of State (State) and Homeland Security (DHS) announced a proposed plan to be implemented in three phases beginning on December 31, 2005 for the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. After further review and considering the delay in publishing the public notice in the Federal Register, State and DHS recognized that implementing the December 31, 2005, phase would be problematic for travelers. This new timeline will simplify the implementation and provide a longer lead-time for travelers to come into compliance with the requirements.

As previously noted, the passport will be the document of choice for travel within the Western Hemisphere or re-entry. However, another document that we anticipate will be acceptable under the travel initiative is the Border Crossing Card, (BCC – or “laser visa”). Currently, the BCC serves in lieu of a passport and a visa for citizens of Mexico traveling to the U.S. from contiguous

territory. Other documents that we are considering for acceptance under this initiative are the Customs and Border Protection Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI), NEXUS and Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program cards.

No currently existing documents other than the BCC, SENTRI, NEXUS or FAST cards are under active consideration as substitutes for the passport. However, DHS and State are reviewing new technological developments regarding options for secure travel documents. Acceptable documents must establish the citizenship and identity of the bearer, and include significant security features. Ultimately, all documents used for travel to the U.S. are expected to include biometrics that can be used to authenticate the document and verify identity.

To provide vital information to the general public, the Departments of Homeland Security and State are issuing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) on the plan to the public and requesting input and/or comment on the suggested documents and possible alternative documents that can meet the statutory requirements. A more formal rulemaking will be issued later this year following review of those comments to implement the first phase of the initiative. This rulemaking will take into account comments received from the ANPRM as well as soliciting further comments on the rulemaking itself.

Those wishing to comment on the proposal may access the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> and follow the instructions for submitting comments.

For more information, visit www.dhs.gov or www.travel.state.gov

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<http://curacao.usconsulate.gov>

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