



Vast Majority of Visa Waiver Countries Meet Security Upgrade to e-Passports

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced today that nearly all of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries have met the requirement for issuing e-Passports. Working in close collaboration with the United States, 24 of the 27 VWP countries have met today's deadline, requiring all newly issued passports to contain a contactless chip with the passport holder's biographic information and a biometric identifier, such as a digital photograph of the holder.

An e-Passport securely identifies the bearer, defends against identity theft, protects privacy and makes it difficult for individuals to cross borders using fraudulent documents. During the past two years, the U.S. government has collaborated with VWP countries to develop the technical standards and capability to ensure that the e Passports were operable with the readers at U.S. ports of entry.

"The department is committed to shutting down the ability of terrorists and criminals to use false travel documents to move freely through our borders. The upgrade to e-Passports is a significant advance in preventing terrorists from using lost or stolen passports to obtain entry into the United States," said DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff. "I applaud the many Visa Waiver Program countries in compliance with this requirement, and we continue to work closely with the remaining countries toward their speedy and complete compliance."

In July 2005, DHS announced the requirement that passports issued by VWP countries on or after October 26, 2006, must be e Passports to be valid for entry into the United States without a visa. These e Passports must comply with technical standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Other types of valid passports that can be used to enter the United States include: machine-readable passports with a digital photograph issued before October 26, 2006, or a machine-readable passport issued before October 26, 2005.

The United States continues to work with the three countries not yet issuing e Passports, Andorra, Brunei and Liechtenstein, to ensure that they meet the requirement as soon as possible. Travelers from these countries will need to obtain a visa to enter the United States if they hold a passport issued on or after October 26, 2006, until e-Passports are available.

The e Passports being issued by VWP countries carry the international e-Passport symbol on the cover, contain a contactless chip with personal information and have critical security features which prevent the unauthorized reading or "skimming" of data stored on the chip. Many non VWP countries around the world have also begun to issue e Passports to reduce the use of fraudulent travel documents and facilitate legitimate travel.

The inspection process at a U.S. port of entry does not change for an e-Passport holder. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers will have the ability to read the e Passport's chip at inspection booths displaying the international e Passport symbol.

The 27 countries participating in the VWP include: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The Visa Waiver Program applies to citizens of these 27 countries traveling to the United States for 90 days or less for tourism or business. Approximately 15 million people each year travel to the United States under the VWP to conduct business, visit family or tour the country.

Travelers who wish to verify whether or not their passports meet the requirements and deadlines for VWP travelers, can find details at www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/ or contact a U.S. consular office in their home country.

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