

# **Press Conference with Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Transportation Security Administration Assistant Secretary Kip Hawley, and U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Craig Bone**

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## **Secretary Chertoff:**

Good afternoon, everybody. I'm joined here by Assistant Secretary Hawley of the Transportation Security Administration and Rear Admiral Bone of the United States Coast Guard. And I want to focus attention this afternoon on the issue of our nation's ports. Since September 11th, the United States, and since its formation the Department of Homeland Security, has been putting a lot of focus and a lot of attention on enhancing the security of our nation's ports, because those ports are obviously an important part of our national economy.

Under the Maritime Transportation Safety Act, the Coast Guard has enforced tough new security requirements for port facilities and vessels, including the development of intersecurity plans, increased surveillance measures, and the hardening of port infrastructure.

Customs and Border Protection has put in place a series of screening and inspection systems, including modern radiation detection technology, in order to identify, inspect and reject potentially high-risk cargo before it can enter the United States.

Since September 2001, and including the budget request the President has submitted to Congress for fiscal year 2007, the government has either spent or requested \$9 billion in spending for maritime security. That's money that goes to the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection, as well as in grants, to ports for purposes of elevating port security.

We've also established new security partnerships at 44 international seaports and with thousands of private sector shipping and logistics companies with the objective of raising security overall in the maritime domain.

If we take these together, these security measures provide a ring of protection around our ports that has made our nation stronger and global commerce more secure in the years since September 2001.

But we still have more work to do. Today I am announcing yet another step in DHS plan to implement a comprehensive personnel screening program for port workers nationwide. What this will do is it will elevate security at our ports themselves so that we can be sure that those who enter our ports to do business come for legitimate reasons and not in order to do us harm.

What this program will specifically require is that people working in the ports and those who get daily access to port facilities receive background screening and then a tamper-proof biometric credential that will strengthen our security at all of these facilities. We are going to begin to implement this program immediately.

Today, the Coast Guard has exercised its legal authority to submit a notice requiring these background checks at our nation's ports. TSA will immediately begin conducting name-based background checks on all port workers operating at major U.S. ports.

And to jump start this step, we've already been working and consulting with our industry partners to provide a process that will compare a worker's biographical information against our terrorist watch lists. Workers who we determine pose a security risk will be denied access to our nation's ports.

Moreover, these checks will also include a review of a worker's immigration status, conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and supported at TSA. Just like with other critical sectors of our economy, we will not tolerate the employment of illegal workers at our nation's ports or maritime critical infrastructure.

This initial round of background checks, which is beginning with today's legal notice, will cover an estimated 400,000 port workers and will focus first on employees and longshoremen who have daily access to the security areas of port facilities. In other words, we're going to focus on those who could potentially be the greatest risk to our security. TSA anticipates this first layer of checks will be completed by the end of this July.

Now let's move to the next stage. In addition to conducting background checks, we need to make sure that our ports have a reliable way to verify the identity of those workers who are being checked. We need to make sure that once the workers are checked, we know who they are, and only those who have passed background checks can use identification to get into our nation's ports.

For that reason, TSA has been developing a 21st century identification card for transportation workers, what we call the Transportation Worker Identification Credential, or TWIC. The TWIC card, which was mandated by Congress, will include biometric technology that is intended to make it virtually impossible for the card to be misused by another person. TWIC will also help streamline the background check procedure across our entire transportation system.

Now, TSA has already tested the technology and the business process required to implement this credential. During the testing phase, which ended in June of 2005, more than 4,000 of these credentials were issued to transportation workers at 26 locations in six states. So we've now proven this technology can work in the field. We expect these cards will eventually be issued to some three-quarters of a million workers who have unescorted access to sensitive maritime facilities. TWIC will be deployed at all commercial ports in the United States. And background investigations and issuance of TWIC cards will be required not only for port facility workers, but for others that need to have regular, unescorted access to a secure facility, such as certain crew members, truck drivers and rail employees.

To accomplish this task, we're going to be publishing in the very near future several rules that spell out the specific details of our proposed approach, and which will solicit views from the public regarding the final details of this plan.

In addition, we will, of course, conduct an open, competitive procurement to get proposals from qualified firms to do the technology portion of this effort so that we can make sure we have the best possible technology at the most economical price.

The fact of the matter is that we've done the piloting, we've done the testing, and now the time for further piloting and testing is over with. We have to roll up our sleeves, and today we are beginning the process of implementing this long overdue worker identification credential. We're going to finish the required rule-making work, and complete the procurements in time to begin issuing these cards this year. We'll make additional details available and we'll welcome specific comments as we go forward with the legally required rule-making process.

The steps we take today will be yet another boost to the security of our ports. It's an effort which, when completed, will assure our citizens that those people who regularly come and go in the ports have been checked to make sure that they are not a security threat and that they have in their possession a kind of tamper-proof identification card that gives us the assurance that the people we let in are people whom we know and in whom we have confidence.

I'm happy to take questions.

**Question:** So you say you'd begin issuing TWIC this year. Do you have any idea when it will be completed?-

**Secretary Chertoff:** We've got to go through a rule-making process, we've got to go through procurement. It's not going to be something that we're going to be able to begin issuing, in terms of cards, this summer. It will be sometime later this year. But the background checks will begin immediately.

**Question:** Well, when do you expect to have the fully deployed TWIC for all 750,000?

**Secretary Chertoff:** Again, it partly depends on the speed of the procurement, and so I can't give you a prediction. We will begin this year, and we anticipate getting it done sometime next year.

**Question:** Is this 750,000 just maritime? You said just maritime. Is that?

**Secretary Chertoff:** It includes people who get regular access to the ports. It can be longshoremen and dock workers, but also people, for example, crews of vessels or rail workers or truckers who regularly go in and out of the ports. So it's not just limited to longshoremen and those who work in the ports themselves. It covers those who want to have unescorted access to the ports.

**Question:** Is your movement to do TWIC at this point just for the maritime part and not for the air ?

**Secretary Chertoff:** I mean, there are other pieces of this, of course, we've done similar types of programs for people who work in airports. The piece we're ready to complete now is the maritime piece. We, of course, have other elements of the transportation sector, which are complicated, and we're going to have to roll those out in sequence.

**Question:** Why is TSA doing the background checks, as opposed to the FBI?

**Secretary Chertoff:** First of all, the FBI has got its hands full doing the background checks they're doing. But TSA is really specifically assigned by Congress to do background checks on transportation. This is part of its core mission.

It's something that they do with respect to, for example, aviation workers. And so they're well equipped to do it.

**Question:** How are the names going to be -- how are the names going to be transmitted to -- where is TSA going to be getting the names and who's going to be submitting the names?

**Secretary Chertoff:**

With that, I have to be careful not to get too far ahead of the rule-making process, because there's all kinds of legal requirements I don't want to violate.

But we have constructed, we're finishing the process of constructing kind of a business process which will take names from people who are, let's say, dock workers or transportation workers who have regular access to the ports. We will enter them into a software, we'll run them against various databases, we'll accumulate the results, we'll make determinations about who is cleared and who is not cleared. And then based on those determinations, people who are cleared will get a card which is a biometric card that is tamper-proof.

**Question:** The Democrats had a press conference over at the Senate this morning in which they said that the administration is falling down on port security, and that they intend to propose an amendment to a port security bill that would require 100 percent screening of all incoming cargo to the United States within three to five years. What do you think of the suggestion that the administration has fallen in its responsibility? And secondly, what do you think of the idea of legislatively mandating 100 percent screening within a very short period of time?

**Secretary Chertoff:** All right, let me start with the first question. Let's see where we were prior to 2001 and where we are now.

Prior to 2001, we didn't have any radiation portal monitors in our U.S. ports. By the end of this year, two-thirds of the containers coming into this country will go through radiation portal monitors, and by the end of next year, virtually every container will go through radiation portal monitors.

Before 2001, we didn't have a network of x-ray machines or gamma machines that we could use to look inside or x-ray inside containers when we had a reason to do so. Now we have a network like that.

Before 2001, we didn't have a Container Security Initiative that systematically puts our Customs inspectors overseas so we could actually do screening and inspection before containers were loaded. Now we have a network of those inspectors overseas in 44 seaports. By the end of this year, 80 percent of the container cargo loaded on ships bound for the U.S. will be coming through seaports that are part of that initiative.

So a tremendous amount has been accomplished. And, again, as I say, including the budget in 2007, we've spent approximately \$9 billion on maritime security. That's money in Coast Guard, that's money in Customs and Border Protection, that's money in grants.

So I don't think it's possible with a straight face, frankly, to make the argument that we haven't done a tremendous amount since 9/11 to raise the level of security in our ports. I'm not saying we're at the end of the road here, but we have made a considerable amount of progress going down that road.

Now, first of all, we do 100 percent screening of everything that comes through the country through our shipping lanes. Based on information we receive, we screen all those containers to determine the high-risk containers, and then we inspect those containers that are high-risk. And as I said, by the end of next year, we will be actually moving all of those containers, or virtually all of them, through radiation portal monitors.

What we don't do, which sometimes people say we should do, is physically inspect every container. And the reason is because if we were to do that, we would make it virtually impossible to move goods into this country because of the time consumed.

And I guess I would say to anybody who says, we want 100 percent inspection of every container that comes in, I think if they come from a port city, they ought to ask the longshoremen in the port, well, what do you think if we have 100 percent physical opening of every container that comes in? I suspect the longshoremen are going to say, well, you know, we'd like to keep our jobs, which means we'd like to keep the port open, so please don't do that.

The fact of the matter is the way to do this, is to do it smart, and the way to do it smart is to use technology, the kind we're using now and the kind I looked over at in Hong Kong a couple weeks ago. It's to use our intelligence to identify the high-risk containers and make sure we do inspect those. But to call for physical inspection of every container is like saying we ought to strip search everybody who gets on an airplane. I mean, in theory, that would make us very safe, but I think it would destroy the airline industry.

So we're not going to strip search people, everybody getting on an airplane, and I don't think it's wise to physically inspect every container. I do think it's wise to use the kind of technology I saw in Hong Kong, and the kind of technology we are using in ports in this country screening 100 percent. check 100 percent for radiation. and make sure

we are looking at any container which is a high-risk.

**Question:** Going back to the other modes for TWIC, does that mean that the TWIC will not be issued to airline workers, railroad workers, et cetera, that don't need access to ports?

**Secretary Chertoff:** No, it means this particular program, which is focused on the maritime area, is going to be focused on those who are coming into the -- either working in the port on a regular basis or have a regular need for access to the port. I mean, Kip, I don't know if you want to talk about what we're planning to do with other modes.

**Assistant Secretary Hawley:** Yes, there are already in place background checks and identification for, principally, aviation, and that is well in hand. The announcement today extends a level of protection that doesn't exist today into the maritime environment. And the others, as to whether it's called a TWIC card or simply a background check plus biometric, that's something that we want to work out with the industry to make it the most effective, the fastest, and least expensive.

**Question:** So the background checks are going to start before the rules are issued? Or is the rule-making -- are the proposed rules going to come out and be finalized before the background checks?

**Secretary Chertoff:** The background check begins now, because under the authority the Coast Guard has, we can insist on the background checks. So that process -- I think the notice is being published or has been sent to the Federal Register to be published today. That process will begin immediately. In fact, we've begun some of this process already.

The rule-making, which has to do with the actual issuance of cards and the procurement of the cards and the various rules that govern that will be forthcoming in short order.

**Question:** This background check you're going to do immediately, does it just mean date of birth, name, and any -- what other information?

**Admiral Bone:** The background check requires a name, date of birth, and then it's optional to have your Social Security number or alien registration number, which is obviously helpful in conducting the background check.

**Question:** And what will you be checking against?

**Admiral Bone:** The terrorist watch list, as well as basically to make sure people are legally here.

**Question:** So how about a criminal check?

**Secretary Chertoff:** I think again, as we move forward with the rule-making, I have to be careful not to anticipate things that will come out in the rule-making. We may expand the amount of -- or the number of databases we run things against. Our first step is to do terrorist watch list and immigration status. Other databases will be something we're going to address in the weeks and months to come.