

## **Machine Readable Passports Required For All Visa Waiver Program Travel as of June 26, 2005**

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today reminded travelers from 27 Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries that as of June 26, 2005, they must have a machine-readable passport to enter the United States without a visa, as mandated by Congress. Machine-readable passports have a sequence of lines that can be swiped by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to confirm the passport holder's identity quickly and to obtain other information about the holder typically found on a passport's inside cover.

The Immigration and Nationality Act originally set October 1, 2003 as the date by which VWP travelers needed to present a machine-readable passport. At the request of 23 of the 27 VWP countries, the United States postponed that requirement until October 26, 2004, for those requesting countries. For a limited period, DHS has been authorizing a one-time waiver for entry into the country for VWP travelers without a machine-readable passport, at no charge to the traveler. This limited period will end on June 26, 2005. Beginning June 26, 2005, transportation carriers will be fined \$3,300, per violation, for transporting any VWP traveler to the United States without a machine-readable passport. Similarly, VWP travelers arriving in the United States on that date without a machine-readable passport should not anticipate being granted one-time entry into the country.

"The machine-readable passport benefits foreign visitors as much as it does homeland security," said Randy Beardsworth, Acting Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security. "With one fast swipe, front line officers can pull up the information that they need to process legitimate travelers quickly. At the same time, this immediate information access enables our officers to focus even more on identifying and interdicting potential threats."

Since October 26, 2004, CBP officers have notified VWP travelers entering the United States with a letter explaining the new entry requirements. In addition, VWP countries are working closely with the United States Government to communicate information about these new requirements to their citizens. Anyone from the 27 VWP countries thinking of traveling to the United States is encouraged to check with their passport issuing authority to ensure they are in possession of a machine-readable passport. As an alternative for persons with immediate travel plans who are unable to obtain a machine-readable passport in time, the individual may apply for a U.S. visa at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy abroad.

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. Any traveler from these 27 countries will need a machine-readable passport on June 26, 2005 to enter the United States. Last year, approximately 15 million VWP travelers visited the United States.

The machine-readable passport requirements do not affect the separate congressionally mandated deadline requiring VWP country passports issued on or after October 26, 2005, to contain biometrics in order to be used for visa free travel to the United States.