

DHS Completes International “e-Passport” Live Test

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Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson announced important progress in the development of biometrically-enabled technologies to prevent the use of fraudulent or stolen international travel documents. DHS is testing e-Passports and e-Passport readers in anticipation of an upcoming deadline requiring all Visa Waiver travelers issued a passport after October 26, 2006, to present an e-Passport to enter the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

The use of the new e-Passports and deployment of e-Passport readers to U.S. ports of entry will help to ensure the authenticity of international travel documents and provide U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers with another invaluable tool for use in the border inspection process.

“We are adopting biometric, electronically-based, and secure travel documents that are tamper resistant, yet provide a very convenient way to move back and forth across our borders,” said Deputy Secretary Jackson. “We have now successfully completed e-Passport technology testing in a live environment. Working with Visa Waiver countries, we will begin to deploy these important security enhancements this year.”

The U.S. anticipates the deployment of e-Passport readers for processing VWP visitors by October 26, 2006. Recently, US-VISIT conducted a successful test of e Passports and e-Passport readers with Basic Access Control (BAC) at San Francisco International Airport. BAC enhances the security of the document and protects the privacy of the traveler by preventing the unauthorized reading, or “skimming,” of information.

The test, which was conducted between January 15, 2006, and April 15, 2006, evaluated the operational impact of reading and verifying information embedded in the e-Passports on the border inspection process. This test was a collaborative effort between the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. A total of 1,938 e-Passports were successfully processed during the test in San Francisco. A similar test was conducted in 2005 at Los Angeles International Airport.

E-Passports contain an individual’s biographic information and a digital photograph on a contactless chip embedded in the document. DHS requires that any passport issued after the October 26 deadline, and used for VWP travel to the United States, must be an e-Passport. In addition, DHS will have the capability to read and authenticate these e-Passports. The U.S. Department of State has begun issuing diplomatic e-Passports and expects to begin issuance of regular e-Passports this summer to U.S. citizens.

Travelers applying for admission under the VWP are allowed to enter the United States for up to 90 days for business or pleasure without obtaining a non-immigrant visa. Those VWP travelers that are issued a passport after October 26, 2006, must present an e-Passport. 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. Approximately 15 million VWP travelers visit the United States annually.