

Passport Requirement for Air Travel Begins Today

Release Date: January 23, 2007

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
Contact: (202) 282-8010

Beginning today, citizens of the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Bermuda are now required to present a passport to enter the United States when arriving by air from any part of the Western Hemisphere.

The department expects a smooth transition to the new passport requirement based on the current numbers of travelers arriving at U.S. airports with passports. Over 90 percent of U.S. citizens, 97 percent of Canadians, and virtually 100 percent of Mexicans and Bermudans flying to the United States over the past week arrived with passports.

The air requirement is part of the departments of State and Homeland Security's Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. This change in travel document requirements is the result of recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission, which Congress subsequently passed into law in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

The only acceptable alternative documents to a passport for air travel will be the Merchant Mariner Document (MMD) and the NEXUS Air card. The MMD, or "z card", is issued by the U.S. Coast Guard to U.S. Merchant Mariners. The NEXUS Air card is issued to citizens of Canada and the United States, lawful permanent residents of the United States and permanent residents of Canada who meet certain eligibility requirements. The NEXUS Air card will only be accepted when used in conjunction with the NEXUS Air program at certain airports. The MMD card will only be accepted when used on official business by U.S. Citizen Merchant Mariners. All active duty members of the United States Armed Forces traveling with military identification will be exempt from the requirement to present a valid passport when entering the United States. Legal Permanent Residents of the U.S. may re-enter on their I-551 Permanent Resident Card.

A separate proposed rule addressing land and sea travel will be published at a later date with specific requirements for travelers entering the United States through land and sea border crossings. As early as Jan. 1, 2008, citizens traveling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda by land or sea may be required to present a valid passport or other documents as determined by the Department of Homeland Security to enter the United States.