

## Travel Security Rules Take Effect Smoothly

### Fliers Ready for Passport Requirement

The Washington Post  
January 24, 2007

Passengers experienced few difficulties yesterday as new border security rules went into effect requiring citizens of the United States, Canada, [Mexico](#), Bermuda and some Caribbean islands to present a passport when entering the United States by air, officials said.

Previously such passengers were able to prove their identity with a variety of documents, including a combination of a birth certificate and a driver's license. Now, under select circumstances, two other documents, the Merchant Mariner Document and the Nexus Air card, will be permitted instead of a passport.

The new rules do not extend to travelers flying to and from U.S. territories in the Caribbean.

The shift to the passport requirement at airports is the first phase of a broader initiative to strengthen scrutiny at all points of entry, an initiative recommended by the commission that investigated the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The new rules are likely to be instituted at land and sea ports as soon as Jan. 1, 2008.

Yesterday's smooth transition was largely because of the high percentage of travelers who had obtained a passport, said authorities.

More than 1.1 million U.S. citizens applied for passports in November, when the date for the new rule was announced, compared with 648,000 applicants in November 2005, said Derwood Staeben, senior adviser for the initiative at the State Department.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, 90 percent of U.S. citizens flying into the country over the last week arrived with passports, compared with 81 percent during the week of Dec. 11.

Citizens of the other affected countries also rushed to obtain passports from their governments, with the percentage of air travelers now carrying them reaching 97 percent for Canadians and nearly 100 percent for Mexicans and Bermudans.

"People have got the message, and that's good news," Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said Thursday in an appearance with Canadian Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day.

For now, those rare travelers who arrive at airports without passports are generally being accommodated rather than turned away, said Kelly Klundt, a spokeswoman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"The goal is not to strand travelers -- it's to advise them of the change," Klundt said. "If for whatever reason they haven't heard of it, we have emergency mechanisms to deal with the situation. . . . We will work with them with whatever documentation they present to try and verify the information we need."

Tourism officials in Mexico and Canada have expressed concern that potential tourists - particularly those traveling by land -- will be turned off by the new passport requirement.

J. Willard "Bill" Marriott Jr., chairman and chief executive of Marriott International, dedicated an entry on his corporate blog Monday to the new passport regulation, part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

"I'm afraid, if it's not properly implemented and communicated, that WHTI could have a serious negative impact on legitimate commerce and tourism, as well as our diplomatic relationships with our two largest trading partners, Canada and Mexico," wrote Marriott, who belongs to an association that has lobbied for changes in security programs.

Similarly, Mexican Tourism Secretary Rodolfo Elizondo Torres predicted that 318,000 fewer Americans would visit Mexico in the next year because of the new requirement. "The lost income could reach \$254 million a year," Torres said in a statement.