



Department of Homeland Security And The State Of Vermont Team Up To Advance Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security agreed to launch a project with the state of Vermont that will enhance the security of state driver's licenses and potentially serve as an acceptable alternative document for crossing the United States' land and sea borders.

The Vermont project, much like the agreement reached with Washington state earlier this year, is one possible compliance alternative to Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) requirements. As announced in June, on Jan. 31, 2008, U.S. and Canadian citizens will need to present either a WHTI-compliant document or a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, plus proof of citizenship such as a birth certificate, for admissibility into the United States. DHS intends to end the routine practice of accepting oral declarations alone at land and sea ports of entry, and also proposes to begin alternative procedures for U.S. and Canadian children at that time.

"I applaud the leadership of the state of Vermont who came forward to join us in our effort to bolster security through secure identification," said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. "This partnership helps us strike the right balance between security and facilitation, incorporating 21st century technology and innovation."

"I'm pleased we will be able to provide this more reasonable option for Vermonters who travel frequently to Canada," said Governor Jim Douglas. "As we move forward with this innovative project, we must continue to include our northern neighbors whose economic and security interests are linked directly to our own."

The state of Vermont will develop an enhanced driver's license that will provide their residents, who voluntarily apply and qualify, with a document that is acceptable for use at U.S. land and sea ports. The enhanced driver's license will be slightly more expensive than a standard Vermont state driver's license and will require proof of citizenship, identity, and residence, as well as contain security features similar to a U.S. passport.

The 9/11 Commission endorsed secure documentation for determining admissibility into the country, and Congress mandated WHTI implementation in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. At present, U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel consider more than 8,000 distinct state issued birth certificates, driver's licenses or other forms of identification when making decisions on who and what to admit into the country.

At a date to be determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security in consultation with the Secretary of State, the departments will implement the full requirements of the land and sea phase of WHTI. DHS and DOS expect the date of full WHTI implementation to be in the summer of 2008. The precise implementation date will be formally announced with at least 60 days notice.

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