

# Press Release

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## **DIGITAL PHOTO DEADLINE FOR PASSPORTS APPROACHING**

### ***October 26th Requirement for Visa Waiver Program Countries***

### ***Will Enhance Security and Facilitate Travel and Trade***

WASHINGTON, DC – The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is reminding visitors that Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries will be required to produce passports with digital photographs by October 26, 2005. The requirement for digital photographs is part of a multi-layered approach to increasing the security of our citizens and visitors by helping to ensure the integrity of their travel documents.

DHS recognizes the importance of travel and trade – particularly from VWP nations – to our own economic and cultural well-being. This is another critical step among many that are bringing us closer to realizing a future vision of a world in which travel around the globe is secure for legitimate visitors and extremely difficult for those who would do us harm.

Visitors with valid machine-readable passports issued prior to October 26, 2005, may continue to travel without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program. Passports issued on or after October 26, 2005 require the digital photo. Visitors who are issued a passport after

the October 26 deadline that does not meet these requirements will be required to obtain a visa to travel to the United States.

Visitors can tell whether their passport meets these requirements if it contains a digital photograph that is printed on the page, not glued or laminated into the document. Digital photographs offer more security against counterfeiting than traditional photographs. Passport guidelines and samples showing what to look for to determine if a passport is in compliance can be viewed on the DHS website at [www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/VWP\\_PassportRequirementTimeline\\_07-2005.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/VWP_PassportRequirementTimeline_07-2005.pdf).

Beginning October 26, 2005, transportation carriers will be fined up to \$3,300, per violation, for transporting any visitor traveling under the Visa Waiver Program to the United States who does not meet these requirements. Similarly, visitors traveling under the Visa Waiver Program arriving in the United States on that date without the proper passport should not anticipate being granted entry into the country.

This prerequisite is mandated by the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 which calls for any passport issued after October 26, 2005, and used for VWP travel, to include a biometric identifier, such as a digital photo. After extensive consultation with Congress and the Department of State, DHS announced the digital photo requirement on June 15, 2005.

In general, digital photographs provide more security against counterfeiting than traditional photographs. While counterfeiting of both traditional and digital photographs can take place, photo switching on the passport data page is generally easier and cheaper to attempt with traditional photographs.

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.

The majority of VWP countries already issue passports with a digital photo integrated into the data page. However, DHS anticipates that three countries—Italy, Austria and

France— will not have enough digital photo production capabilities in operation by October 26, 2005 to replace all passports that will expire with digital photos. DHS will continue to work closely with these countries to certify their full compliance as soon as possible. In the case of Austria, DHS expects compliance with the digital photo requirement in summer 2006. Until that time, Austrians traveling to the U.S. with passports expiring after October 26, 2005 should plan to obtain a visa. In the case of France and Italy, DHS recognizes that certain municipalities will have digital photo capabilities to accommodate the new requirements as of October 26, 2005. However, neither country will have 100% coverage by the deadline. Therefore, travelers from these countries are urged to contact their local passport issuance offices to obtain information on whether a digital passport can be issued. If not, DHS urges travelers to obtain a visa prior to travel to the U.S.

Instructions to apply for a U.S. visa are available at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov), by calling the Department of State's Visa Services center at (202) 663-1225, or by contacting the nearest consulate or embassy.

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