Feature Topic:

Machine-Readable Passports Required

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Beginning October 1, 2003, each Visa Waiver Program (VWP) traveler must present a machine-readable passport (MRP) in order to enter the U.S. visa-free. VWP nationals who do not have MRPs must obtain a U.S. non-immigrant visa (NIV). I have summarized the key items of this requirement below. Full details can be found at: http://travel.state.gov/vwp.html and http://travel.state.gov/state160834.html. Make sure you give yourself adequate time to obtain a MRP if you do not already hold one.

What is the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)?

The VWP enables citizens of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. There are 27 countries that participate in the VWP; a listing of the countries can be found at http://travel.state.gov/vwp.html.

What Is a Machine Readable Passport?

A machine-readable passport has biographical data entered on the data page according to international specifications. The size of the passport and photograph, and arrangement of data fields, especially the two lines of printed OCR-B machine readable data, meet the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization, Doc 9303, Part 1 Machine Readable Passports. OCR-B means the type is Optical Character Reader size B.

Do I Currently Hold a Machine Readable Passport?

Most VWP countries began issuing MRPs in the early or mid-1990s, so most VWP travelers will have no trouble complying with this requirement. Countries such as Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and France may find that significant portions of their traveling public will need replacement passports. Delays should be anticipated and travel plans should be made accordingly.

Questions should be directed to the passport issuing authority in your country of citizenship.

Questions and/or comments on this issue of Users' Updates should be directed to: Susan White-DePace 631-344-7959 or swd@bnl.gov.