

Digital Photo for passports required for travel to US

21 October 2005

The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Homeland Security are reminding visitors that Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries will be required to produce passports with digital photographs by 26 October 2005. The requirement for digital photographs is part of a multi-layered approach to increase the security of our citizens and visitors by ensuring the integrity of their travel documents.

Individual travelers should note that this new requirement applies only to passports issued on or after 26 October 2005, and only to travelers under the VWP. Only new passports issued on or after 26 October require the digital photo. VWP visitors with valid, machine-readable passports issued prior to 26 October 2005 may continue to travel without a visa under the VWP until their passport's expiration.

Because the Netherlands currently produces all of its new passports with digital photos, this deadline represents no change in Dutch citizen passport holders' visa-free travel to the United States. However, some VWP countries may not issue qualifying passports to all of their citizens by 26 October. The Department of Homeland Security anticipates that three countries – Italy, Austria and France – will not have enough digital photo production capabilities in operation by the deadline to replace all passports that will expire with digital photos. Bearers of such passports 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 photograph that is printed on the page, not glued or laminated into the document.

Instructions to apply for a U.S. visa are available at www.usembassy.nl.

Background Information

Beginning 26 October 2005, transportation carriers will be fined up to \$3,300 per violation, for transporting any visitor traveling under the VWP to the United States who does not meet these requirements. Similarly, visitors traveling under the VWP 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, the Department of Homeland Security 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 are: 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 26 October 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 26 October 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 26 October 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.

