

TPC Tourism Policy Council NEWS ALERT

Issue 1 – July 2003

News Service from the Tourism Policy Council
in the U.S. Department of Commerce

IMPORTANT: NEW PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS TO THE U.S.

Changes to Take Effect October 1, 2003

Required: Machine Readable Passports

All Visa Waiver Program travelers will be required to present a valid Machine Readable Passport (MRP) for visa-free entry into the United States. **The new requirement will take effect October 1, 2003** (May 15, 2003 for Belgian passport-carrying travelers). This is acceleration by four years of the official requirements for this segment of travelers. Visa Waiver Program travelers are those who travel to the United States for business or leisure for a period of less than 90 days, and have a round trip ticket.

Travelers without MRPs

Most Visa Waiver countries began issuing Machine Readable Passports in the early or mid-1990s, so the majority of travelers from these countries should be able to easily comply with this requirement. Some countries, notably Switzerland, Italy, and Spain, may find significant numbers of their travelers in need of either a replacement passport or a Non-Immigrant Visa. Visa Waiver Program nationals who are unable to obtain a Machine Readable Passport will need a Non-Immigrant Visa.

Families and Groups Visiting the United States

U.S. bound families and groups should obtain an individual passport for each traveler, including infants. Machine Readable Passports typically have biodata for only one traveler in the machine-readable portion of the passport, and families may be denied visa-free entry into the United States if the biodata for only one traveler is machine-readable.

For Information about the Visa Waiver Program and Machine Readable Passports:

<http://travel.state.gov/vwp.html>

General inquiries about visa cases and the application process:

http://travel.state.gov/visa_services.html or <http://unitedstatesvisas.gov>

Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov>