



## WESTERN HEMISPHERE TRAVEL INITIATIVE

### Overview

To implement Sec. 7209 of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, which addressed travel documents and the so-called Western Hemisphere “exemption,” the Departments of State and Homeland Security (DHS) created the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). This requires all travelers (including U.S. citizens) to have a passport or other accepted document that establishes identity and citizenship upon entry or re-entry into the U.S. from Central and South America, the Caribbean, Bermuda, Canada and Mexico. The travel industry has consistently supported WHTI, but insists the federal government implement the new rules in a manner that does not interrupt the flow of cross-border travel and trade and more aggressively educate travelers on both sides of the border.

The first phase of WHTI began on January 23, 2007 when a passport was required for all Western Hemisphere air travel into the U.S. The second phase includes travel through land and sea ports-of-entry and in addition to a passport, other acceptable travel documents will include the NEXUS travel card (U.S./Canada), the SENTRI travel card (U.S./Mexico), the more recently introduced U.S. Passport Card, as well as enhanced driver’s licenses issued by state or provincial governments in the U.S. and Canada.

Congress has acted more than once to extend the deadline for implementation of WHTI for land and sea travel into the U.S. This was done out of concern for the lack of alternative travel documents that qualify under WHTI and to avoid creating gridlock at our borders. WHTI travel document requirements cannot be applied at land and sea ports-of-entry prior to June 2009, subject to specific legislative requirements.

In a related development intended to ease the transition to full land/sea operation of WHTI, DHS formally ceased accepting oral declarations of citizenship from U.S. and Canadian travelers entering at land border ports-of-entry starting January 31, 2008. The government is asking travelers to present a government-issued photo ID (driver’s license) and a birth certificate to enter by land, but is conducting “soft” enforcement during what it terms a “transition period.”

### Economics

From a U.S. travel perspective, the primary effect of the new WHTI travel document rules pertain chiefly to inbound travel from Canada. The statistics below illustrate the impact of Canadian travel.

- Canadians made 40 million visits to the U.S. in 2006, making it the largest market for international visitors...
  - 16 million travelers (40%) stayed one or more nights.
  - The average overnight visit was 7.5 nights.
  - 24 million travelers (60%) returned the same day.
- What’s at Risk: Each 5% reduction in travel from Canada to the U.S. will mean a loss of 400,000 travelers and \$671 million in visitor spending annually.

### Outlook

The Travel Industry Association is closely monitoring any negative impacts on cross-border travel as a result of WHTI implementation. While DHS’ Customs and Border Protection did launch a limited advertising campaign with print and broadcast ads in early September, 2008, more is needed to fully inform travelers on both sides of the border.

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