New Requirements for Travelers Between the United States and the Western Hemisphere
(From www.travel.state.gov)

Travelers to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Panama, Mexico and Canada will be required to have a passport or other secure, accepted document to enter or re-enter the United States. This is a change from prior travel requirements and will affect all United States citizens entering the United States from countries within the Western Hemisphere who do not currently possess valid passports. This new requirement will also affect certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States. Most Canadian citizens, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, and to a lesser degree, Mexican citizens will be affected by the implementation of this requirement.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation for Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative Requirements
The travel initiative requirements will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed implementation timeline is as follows:

- December 31, 2005 – Passport or other accepted document required for all travel (air/sea) to or from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Central and South America.
- December 31, 2006 – Passport or other accepted document required for all air and sea travel to or from Mexico and Canada.
- December 31, 2007 – Passport or other accepted document required for all air, sea, and land border crossings.

Frequently Asked Questions about the New Travel Document Requirements (FAQs)

What is the new travel document requirement?
All travelers to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Panama, Canada, or Mexico will be required to have a passport or other accepted document that establishes the bearer’s identity and nationality to enter or re-enter the United States. This is a change from prior travel requirements. The goal is to strengthen border security and facilitate entry into the United States for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors. This new requirement will be known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

Who does this requirement affect?
All United States citizens traveling within the Western Hemisphere who do not currently possess valid passports will be affected.

Certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States, namely most Canadian citizens, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, and Mexican citizens will also be affected.

When will the new travel initiative requirement be implemented?
The travel initiative requirements will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline is as follows:

- December 31, 2005 – Passport or other accepted document required for all travel (air/sea) to or from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Central and South America.
- December 31, 2006 – Passport or other accepted document required for all air and sea travel to or from Mexico and Canada.
- December 31, 2007 – Passport or other accepted document required for all air, sea, and land border crossings.
How Do I get a passport?
U.S. citizens may visit the Passport section of this website for information on how to apply for a U.S. passport. You should allow yourself a sufficient amount of time to apply and receive your passport in advance of travel. Please allow 6-8 weeks for processing of U.S. passport applications.

Peak U.S. passport processing is between January and July. For faster service, we recommend applying between August and December.

Foreign nationals should contact their respective governments to obtain passports.

Other than a passport, what types of documents will be acceptable under this initiative?
The passport is the document of choice because of the incorporated advanced security features. Individuals traveling to the Caribbean, Bermuda, Panama, Mexico or Canada are encouraged to obtain a passport.

For land border crossings, other documents that we anticipate will be acceptable under this Initiative are SENTRI and NEXUS program cards. These are current international frequent traveler programs.

We anticipate that the Border Crossing Card (BCC – also known as “laser visa”) will also be acceptable as a substitute for a passport and a visa for citizens of Mexico traveling to the United States from contiguous territory.

No other document is currently available that will be an acceptable substitute for the passport, or the Border Crossing Card, SENTRI, NEXUS or FAST cards. However, we are using new technologies to create other acceptable travel documents. We will make public additional travel document options as they become available.

Why is the U.S. Government going to require a passport or other secure identity document?
The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 mandated that the U.S. Secretaries of Homeland Security and State develop and implement a plan to require U.S. citizens and foreign nationals to present a passport or other appropriate secure identity and citizenship documentation when entering the United States.

For many years U.S. citizens, and some citizens of other countries in the Western Hemisphere including Canadians, have not been required to present a passport to enter the U.S. Other forms of documents, less secure than the passport, have historically been accepted.

In light of the new security efforts, the United States is requiring travelers to have a passport or other accepted documents for entry into the United States.

Can the general public provide input into the planning and implementation of the travel initiative requirements?
The Departments of State and Homeland Security will be asking for public comments on this initiative in the near future. The government expects that acceptable documents must establish the citizenship and identity of the bearer through electronic data verification and will include significant security features. Ultimately, all documents used for travel to the United States are expected to include biometrics that can be used to authenticate the document and verify identity.

How will the new travel initiative requirements impact travel at the land borders?
The Departments of State and Homeland Security understand that the greatest potential change will occur at the land borders. The new statute specifically mandates that the concerns of border communities be considered. We recognize the implications this might have for industry, business, and the general public, as well as our neighboring countries, and they are important partners in this initiative.

Will this requirement apply to travel between the United States and Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands?
Travel between the United States and U.S. territories will not be affected by the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. U.S. citizens traveling between the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam will continue to be able to use established forms of identification to board flights and for entry.
If traveling outside of the United States or a U.S. territory, a passport or other secure document will be required. For example, a person may travel to and from the United States to the U.S. Virgin islands without a passport or other secure document, but under proposed regulations, a passport or other secure document would be required to re-enter the U.S. Virgin Islands from the British Virgin Islands or another country as of December 31, 2005.