Secretary Napolitano Announces Elimination of Paper Arrival/Departure Form to Streamline Secure Visa Waiver Program Travel

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Washington, D.C.—Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano today announced the elimination of the paper arrival/departure form (Form I-94W) for authorized travelers from nations participating in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP)—streamlining secure travel for millions of visitors to the United States every year by consolidating the collection of traveler information and enhancing security by automatically providing DHS with important passenger information prior to departure.

"The Visa Waiver Program facilitates secure and hassle-free travel for citizens of participating countries—making international travel safer and easier," said Secretary Napolitano. "This step to eliminate the paper I-94W leverages the latest technology to further bolster security, increase convenience for visitors and better protect privacy."

Following a successful seven-month pilot program conducted with the support of the Government of New Zealand on Air New Zealand flights from Auckland to Los Angeles International Airport, the use of paper I-94W forms will be eliminated for VWP travelers with an approved Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) arriving in the United States at all airports by the end of this summer. CBP will activate automated processing for U.S. airports on a rolling basis over the next several months.

Under the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, applying for an ESTA became mandatory on January 12, 2009, for all nationals of VWP countries prior to boarding a carrier to travel by air or sea to the United States. This requirement does not affect U.S. citizens returning from overseas or citizens of VWP countries traveling on a valid U.S. visa, and allows DHS to determine whether a VWP traveler presents a threat long before the individual boards a U.S.-bound aircraft.

The elimination of the paper I-94W form enables travelers to provide basic biographical, travel and eligibility information automatically through ESTA prior to departure for the United States —reducing redundancy and enhancing the security of sensitive personal information, as CBP stores and protects all VWP data electronically on secure servers.

CBP recommends that travelers submit ESTA applications as soon as an applicant begins making travel plans. ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel, and once approved, will be valid for two years or until the applicant's passport expires. To date, CBP has received more than 19 million ESTA applications from citizens of VWP countries—applications that will now automatically cover I-94W submission.

VWP—established as a pilot program in 1986 to help facilitate travel and made permanent in 2000—currently enables the nationals of 36 participating countries to travel to the United States for up to 90 days without obtaining a visa.

For more information about ESTA, please visit www.cbp.gov.

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