



IMMIGRATION ALERT!



Machine Readable Passport Requirement On Hold for 21 Countries

Citizens of the so-called "Visa Waiver Program" countries are permitted to enter the United States for general business or tourist purposes for a maximum of 90 days without needing a B visa. In part due to national security issues, that rule was scheduled to change effective October 1, 2003. Under the proposed change, a person would have been allowed to use the Visa Waiver Program only if he or she held a machine readable passport. If there was not machine readable passport, then the visitor would have been required to apply for a B visa, a potentially time-consuming process.

For some countries, the Secretary of State has granted a postponement until October 26, 2004, as the date by which Visa Waiver Program travelers from 21 countries must present a machine-readable passport to be admitted to the country without a visa.

The countries for which the postponement has been granted are: Australia, Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Each of the above countries lodged a formal request, certifying that it is making progress toward the goal of ensuring that machine readable passports are available for its citizens.

Five other eligible countries did not request a postponement of the effective date, because most of their citizens already have machine-readable passports. Those countries include Andorra, Brunei, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Slovenia. Thus, effective October 1, 2003, visitors from those five countries must have either a machine-readable passport or a B visitor visa.

As reported previously, Belgian nationals who wish to travel under the Visa Waiver Program have been required to hold a machine-readable passport since May 15, 2003.

Seyfarth Shaw's Business Immigration Group provides periodic information alerts about noteworthy developments in the business immigration field. The information that we provide is of a general nature and should not be interpreted as legal advice applicable to a specific factual situation. If you have questions about the information contained in this Immigration Alert or would like to know more about Seyfarth Shaw's Business Immigration Group and our inbound and outbound visa processing capabilities, please visit our website, www.immstar.com, or contact one of the Business Immigration Group Partners: Jim King (jking@seyfarth.com) in Atlanta; Russell Swapp(rswapp@seyfarth.com) or Dyann DelVecchio (ddelvecchio@seyfarth.com) in Boston; Ric Fischer (Ffischer@seyfarth.com) in Chicago; or Cris Weals (cweals@dc.seyfarth.com) in DC. If you would like to receive our Immigration Alerts, please contact Sarah Kuck via e-mail at skuck@seyfarth.com. Thank you.