



News Update On Border Crossing

The following is good or bad news depending upon what side of the Canadian-United States border an individual resides on. The web site Connect2Canada.com that *Agency Sales* magazine introduced its readers to last year reports on a change in the documentation that will be required for crossing the border. At first glance it appears a positive for U.S. businesspeople crossing into Canada — but not necessarily so for Canadian businesspeople traveling south.

According to a report that appeared on the web site, only 40 percent of Canadians have a passport. By the end of the year, Canadians traveling to the United States by air or sea will be required to have that documentation. A passport will be mandatory for land crossings by 2008. These facts may well make cross-border travel more difficult when the new rules kick in.

Aggravations, if not downright difficulties in crossing the border between the two countries, were covered in the October 2004 issue of *Agency Sales*. Typical of

comments included in the article on the subject were:

- “Owing largely to the fact the service received by border personnel is less than polite, I find the process fairly intimidating.”
- “If I can avoid it, I just don’t cross the border anymore. For me, it’s become an unfriendly experience. The United States isn’t inviting people in the way it used to.”

It remains to be seen whether what follows will smooth out what has become a less-than-pleasant experience.

Referring back to the recent article in Connect2Canada, border crossing rules that were legislated by the United States after September 11, 2001 were supposed to be the same for Americans (as they are for Canadians), obliging them to have a passport in order to return home. However, a change in that original policy will allow Americans to use a new identity card — costing half the price of a passport — in order to cross the border by land and then return home.

The article reports that “Canadian tour operators were wor-

ried the passport requirement would stifle cross-border travel, and were relieved that the initiative makes it easier for Americans to travel to Canada. However, they hope the implementation is smooth to ensure traffic keeps flowing across the busiest border in the world.

“We all want safety and security, but we want to ensure access is at the lowest possible cost and people can get these cards without having to go through bureaucracy,” said Michael Merrithew of the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies.

The identity card, the People Access Secure Service or PASS card, will only be useful for people crossing the border over land. Those who travel to the United States by sea or air will still require a passport. There’s no word on whether Canadian officials will follow the lead of the United States and implement a similar plan. If not, millions of Canadians who cross the border on a regular basis will require a passport by 2008.

According to the article, U.S.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff announced the new measures, and said the travel card will be a cheap alternative to passports. "By the end of the year, we anticipate issuing new identity documents for border crossings" so that travelers would "not necessarily" require passports.

Chertoff continued that the new documentation requirements for Canada and Mexico were mandated by legislation Congress passed in 2004 to strengthen security at border crossings. Traditionally, Americans who have traveled to countries in the Western Hemisphere have not needed to present passports upon their return. But the new law requires that secure documents are presented upon their return, a requirement that will be phased in beginning with the Caribbean.

The article continues, "Canadian officials have objected to plans that would require passports, saying it would be too expensive and cumbersome for those who make regular border

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crossings. A statement released by the Department of Homeland Security says officials are 'consulting closely' with Canada and Mexico as they develop the passport card, which will be similar to other personal identification cards such as driver's licenses.

"Chertoff's announcement represents an easing of plans announced last spring, when the department said Americans would need passports to enter the United States from either country beginning in 2008. "The new document is part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, an attempt to increase security following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001."

Other related developments include:

- Expansion of a program that allows companies overseas to enroll in a program that allows for expedited visa processing.
- A pilot program for improved greeting of travelers at American airports, and to allow visa interviews to take place by video-conference so that applicants are not forced to travel great distances to embassies.
- The creation of a government-wide office to handle visa complaints.
- Beginning next year, the only passports issued will be electronic passports, which carry information on a computer chip that can be scanned, as paper-only passports will be phased out as they expire. The pilot program for the "e-passports" began late last year. □

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One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283 • Phone: (949) 859-4040 • Toll-free: (877) 626-2776 • Fax: (949) 855-2973
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