

Important Travel Information for International Attendee's

Monday was the preliminary deadline for European Union states to begin to issue biometrically enabled passports. Although, as indicated in the article below, most EU states missed this internally set deadline, they expect to have systems in place by October 26th, 2006. This is important because on October 26th the U.S. will begin requiring travelers from visa waiver countries (primarily Europe, plus Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Singapore) to either have a biometric passport (also called an e-passport) or to have a visa.

For those of you who anticipate international participants at your meetings, I wanted to make you aware of the October 26th deadline, so you can be prepared to answer questions about it or send information to your members.

This is generally not expected to have a huge impact on travelers from the visa waiver countries. This is because even after October 26th, you can still travel to the U.S. without a visa if your passport was issued: 1) Before October 25, 2005 and has a machine readable zone; or 2) was issued between October 25th, 2005 and October 26th, 2006 and has a digital photograph. Any passport issued after Oct. 26th, 2006 without a biometric chip will not be accepted without a visa.

If your passport does not fit into these categories, you can still come to the U.S., you just need to get a visa as if you were not from a visa waiver country. This will add time and expense to the process, although it is difficult to estimate how much since citizens of these countries do not normally seek visas.

According to the National Academies, the only country expected to have problems (because the majority of their currently issued passports do not fit into one of the above categories) is France.

Those of you sending out mail regarding meetings to international members or scientists in visa waiver countries may wish to make them aware of these upcoming changes, so they can check if their passport is suitable and consider replacing it if is not. Before replacing their passport, they should make sure that their country has begun to issue the biometric or e-passports. If they anticipate traveling to the U.S. after Oct. 26th and their passport does not meet the requirements as detailed above, but they cannot or will not replace it, they should begin investigating requirements for applying for a visa as soon as possible.

For more information please see:

http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/content_multi_image/content_multi_image_0021.xml