



MEDIA ALERT

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July 24, 2008

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U.S. ANNOUNCES ELECTRONIC SYSTEM FOR TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION FOR VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has announced that, beginning on a voluntary basis on August 1, 2008, travelers using the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) will be able to provide certain information electronically before traveling to the United States. The system does not affect those travelers who have obtained a valid visa from a U.S. Embassy or Consulate overseas.

Currently, citizens of VWP countries complete a written form providing basic biographic, travel, and eligibility information while en route to the United States. Under the electronic system, called the Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA), visa waiver travelers will provide this information online prior to their departure for the United States.

The ESTA will enable the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to approve VWP candidates for travel *before* they depart Australia. Once the electronic system becomes mandatory on January 12, 2009, all travelers entering the United States for temporary business or pleasure under the VWP will need to receive an electronic travel authorization prior to boarding a U.S.-bound airplane or cruise ship.

Under the new electronic system, VWP travelers will provide this information online 72 hours prior to their departure for the United States. Most travelers will receive a response within several minutes, and the system has been planned to allow for last-minute or emergency travel plans.

"The Electronic System for Travel Authorization will be a more efficient method of collecting the same information VWP travelers already provide on the I-94W card," said Thurmond Borden, Country Consular Coordinator of the U.S. Mission to Australia.

Travelers to Australia already participate in a similar program under the Australian Government's Electronic Travel Authority system.

MEDIA NOTE:

**US consular officials are available for interviews on the new ESTA.
To schedule an interview please contact:**

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