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Preparing for safe travel

Learn America's changing travel requirements for your employees

By Margie Dolgin, CTC, MCC & CTIE

Many people continue to travel across country and abroad, despite heightened security and the increasing cost of travel due to rising fuel costs. As an employee services provider, it is your responsibility to stay informed on the latest travel regulations so that you may communicate them to employees. Changing regulations will affect your travel programs and employees' travel arrangements. Travel agents are likely the best resource for the latest travel information as well as a few key websites. Learning the reasons behind our country's security demands will help employees better prepare for travel and enjoy themselves in the process. Please read on to learn the latest in safe travel.

Our new government

The U.S. government includes an agency called the Department of Homeland Security. Due in part to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security encompasses some of the following departments—Border and Transportation Security, Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection, Coast Guard, Secret Service, Citizenship, and Immigration Services. After the government created the Transportation Security Administration as part of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of November 19, 2001, it added security fees to the cost

of airline tickets and many other security requirements for which frequent travelers are now familiar. For example, wait times vary at airport security checkpoints, but are normally long. Travelers are advised to arrive at the airport at least two hours before their scheduled flights to allow for lengthy security lines. Furthermore, travelers have grown



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accustom to removing their jackets, hats, shoes, and jewelry before walking through airport security sensors. In many cases, they also must remove their sneakers, which were once permitted. The savvy traveler dresses airport-ready, with removable layers of clothing that streamline the process. As long as travelers are prepared for airport security, most will walk away without hassles prior to entering the terminal.

In the world of changing security requirements, the procedures that the Transportation Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security put in place now will not necessarily remain the same in the future. For example, past regulations permitted cigarette lighters on board the aircraft. In the last year, regulations have changed in that all lighters are prohibited as carry-on items and only lighters without fuel are permitted in checked baggage. Furthermore, up to four books of safety (non-strike anywhere) matches are permitted as carry-on items, but all matches are prohibited in checked baggage.

Cruise-line security

Prior to the new U.S. government rules, most cruise lines maintained a higher level of security than airports. This includes increased inspections of luggage and carry-on articles, additional security personnel and controls and the use of canine inspections. Their high security standards are due to an incident in October of 1985, when members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) hijacked the Italian cruise ship, the Achille Lauro, and demanded release of PLO prisoners, killing a disabled American passenger. As a result, the cruise lines worked with the Coast Guard to establish significant security plans. By increasing their security to the highest level, post 9/11, the cruise lines avoided the major delays that occurred with most airlines.

Passport requirements

Currently, when traveling by plane within the U.S., a driver's license serves as a sufficient form of identification. On cruise ships, the government permits travelers





the option of providing alternative forms of identification, such as a certified birth certificate, marriage license, divorce certificate, and child custody papers. However, in April 2005, the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security announced the beginning phases of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative for travelers between the U.S. and the Western Hemisphere. The purpose of their initiative is to strengthen our border security by limiting entry into the U.S. only to U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors.

- By December 31, 2005, the U.S. government will require passports on all cruise ships and air travel to or from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Central America, and South America.

- By December 31, 2006, the U.S. government will add Canada and Mexico to the list of borders requiring a passport. Since travel to Mexican ports-of-call are so prevalent during cruises, as an added travel security, some cruise lines will require passengers to have passports starting December 31, 2005 for travel to Mexico. Employees currently planning a cruise trip for 2006 should speak with a travel agent to ensure they bring proper identification.

- By December 31, 2007, the U.S. government will extend the passport requirements to all land border crossings as well as air and sea border crossings.

- By January 1, 2008, the initiative will require that all U.S. citizens traveling by air and sea outside America's boundaries carry a passport. This new requirement will also affect certain foreign nationals, who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the U.S. Most Canadian, Bermuda and Mexican citizens traveling to the U.S. will be affected by the implementation of this requirement.

Passport resources and advice

Employees must allot sufficient time to apply and receive a passport in advance of travel arrangements. If you apply within the U.S., allow no less than six weeks for processing of passport applications. As a rule of thumb, apply to obtain a passport immediately upon making travel arrangements. Peak domestic passport processing occurs between January and July. For faster service, apply during August and December. Foreign nationals may contact their respective governments to obtain passports. Be aware that there are costs to obtaining a passport, which usually expires every 10 years. Below are links to websites that will assist employees in ascertaining the necessary documentation for their future travel plans.

www.travel.state.gov: This is the U.S. Department of State's travel website, in which your employees can obtain passport information, tips on traveling abroad, visa information, and more. Your employees also can call the U.S. National Passport Information Center toll-free at (877) 487-2778.

www.tsa.gov: The website for the Transportation Security Administration lists the items permitted and prohibited on board an aircraft for carry-on and checked baggage. The restrictions change often, so it's best to contact the Transportation Security Administration's Consumer Response Center toll-free at (866) 289-9673, e-mail tsa-contactcenter@dhs.gov or visit the website.

www.usps.com/passport: At the U.S. Postal Service website, employees can apply for a U.S. passport and take passport photos at local offices providing this service. Visit the website to locate a post office near you.

www.uscis.gov: This is the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security. Call the USCIS toll-free at (800) 375-5283.



www.immigrationagency.org: This is the U.S. Immigration Support website, in which you can learn which documents are required for travel. It is best to ask your travel agent and then visit the site for more information. This website is not part of a U.S. governmental agency.

www.passportsandvisas.com: This website is for passport and visa information. Your employees can call toll-free at (800) 860-8610. This website is not part of a U.S. governmental agency.

www.zvs.com: Visit the Zierer Visa Services website for visa requirements for U.S. and Canadian citizens. Your employees can call toll-free at (866) 788-1100. This website is not part of a U. S. governmental agency.

Conclusion

Employees look to leisure travel for rest and relaxation and an escape from day-to-day activities. The travel industry has changed its regulations and will

continue to alter them to keep travelers safe, but a travel agent can assist employees with their plans and offer the information they need. The websites listed in this article will prove resourceful for them in abiding by new regulations effective December 31, 2005 and the next couple of years. By remaining informed of new developments, employees can travel stress free and enjoy their vacations. **esm**

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Employer of Choice

Nominate Your CEO

Have your company recognized as an Employer of Choice by nominating your Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as ESM Association's 2006 Employer of the Year. ESM Association Headquarters is now accepting nominations for the 2006 Employer of the Year Award. Organizational Members may submit their CEO for nomination by December 2, 2005. We plan this far in advance so that the winner may be notified and his/her schedule cleared for acceptance at the Awards Presentation during ESM Association's 65th Annual Conference & Exhibit, May 7-10, 2006, at the TradeWinds Island Grand Beach Resort on St. Pete Beach, FL.

The criteria for judging entries are as follows:

- *The person must be the CEO or equivalent of the member company.*
- *The CEO should have a general knowledge of the company's employee services program.*
- *The nominee must make statements regarding why and to what extent he or she supports the program.*
- *The CEO must justify how employee services are important to the productivity and morale of the workforce.*
- *The CEO must have a reasonable chance of accepting the award in person, i.e., the nominee's schedule is clear (at the time the nomination is submitted) to accept the award at the conference.*

Please fax or e-mail nominations to ESM Association Headquarters, Attention: Employer of the Year
FAX: 630-559-0025 E-mail: esmahq@esmassn.org

Deadline: December 2, 2005

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