

New Travel Regulation for International Visitors Takes Effect

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> Effective January 20, inbound travelers to the United States from Visa Waiver Program

> <http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html#countries>

> countries may be denied boarding by the airlines if they haven't

> complied with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Electronic

> System for Travel Authorization program.

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> ESTA, introduced in January 2009

> <<http://meetingsnet.com/associationmeetings/news/1112-get-know-esta/index.html>>,

> requires all international travelers from VWP countries to register in

> an online database. Previously, international travelers had to fill out

> an I-94W form before each trip, but ESTA seeks to streamline and update

> the process. Now, international travelers to the United States must go

> to the ESTA Web site <<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>> and fill out an

> application before entering the country by air or sea. If approved, the

> authorization is good for two years and can be renewed. Travelers no

> longer have to fill out an I-94W form before each trip. U.S. officials

> say ESTA will speed up the process for travelers, enable customs

> officials to screen passengers in advance, and improve security.

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> Since ESTA was unveiled on January 12, 2009, it hasn't been strictly

> enforced. Those who didn't apply for ESTA were given a friendly reminder

> to do so next time. But starting January 20, 2010, the program has new

> teeth and, according to the Web site, "VWP travelers who have not

> received an ESTA approval ... may be denied boarding. CBP [U.S. Customs

> and Border Protection] will handle emergencies on a case-by-case basis."

> On January 20, DHS officials initiated a 60-day transition to enforced

> ESTA compliance for air carriers. After that period, the I-94W forms

> will be eliminated, and airlines risk fines for allowing travelers to

> board without the proper documentation.

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> What does this mean for meetings? The U.S. Office of Travel and Tourism

> advises planners to alert international members and attendees to these

> new regulations. They should also post reminders on conference Web sites

> and registration Web pages and provide a link to the ESTA Web site.

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> The U.S. Travel Association expressed disappointment over the

> implementation of the policy, fearing it will make the United States a

> less desirable place to visit. In a press release, U.S. Travel says "the

> U.S. government appears to lack a comprehensive communications campaign,

> alliance with airlines, or partnership with foreign airports to drive

> ESTA enrollment beyond the current level of compliance." The association

> is encouraging Congress to earmark funds for programs that would drive

> enrollment, including Internet kiosks at international airport terminals.

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> The ESTA requirement does not affect U.S. citizens returning from

> overseas, people from VWP countries traveling on a valid U.S. visa, or

> travelers from non-VWP nations.