



**Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Wellington**

4 August, 2003

UNITED STATES TAKES IMMEDIATE STEPS TO MAKE AIR TRAVEL EVEN SAFER

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State today temporarily suspended two programs that allow certain international air passengers to travel through the United States for transit purposes without first obtaining a visa.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued instructions to all airlines to no longer allow passengers to utilize two transit programs, known as the Transit Without Visa program (TWOV) and the International-to-International transit program (ITI). The action took effect at 3:00 a.m. on Sunday August 3, 2003 New Zealand time (11:00 a.m., Saturday August 2, 2003 Eastern Daylight Time.) These global programs have been suspended pending a review within the next 60 days.

While we have come to this decision reluctantly, given the cost in time and money for all concerned, there is no higher priority than the safety of the traveling public, the safety of our foreign guests in the United States and the safety of Americans.

Recent specific intelligence indicates that terrorist groups have been planning to exploit these programs to gain access to the U.S. or U.S. airspace without going through the consular screening process. The steps announced today are designed to augment security against possible terrorist threats. They are intended to protect everyone who flies into and out of the United States.

"The steps announced today, while aggressive, are an appropriate response to the threat. We know they will have an impact on international travelers, but we believe they are necessary in order to protect lives and property," said U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge.

In addition to today's announcement, Homeland Security agencies are also taking additional steps to increase security at airports and on airplanes that normally transport and process passengers under these programs.

This change will not affect persons eligible for the Visa Waiver Program. Persons eligible for the Visa Waiver Program may continue to visit or transit the U.S. without a visa.

Most New Zealand nationals will not be affected by the suspension of these two programs. Most New Zealand nationals visiting or transiting the U.S. do so under the Visa Waiver Program. Travelers who qualify for the VWP may continue to use the VWP and will not require an U.S. visa for transit purposes. However, this change will affect some third country nationals travelling from New Zealand. These travelers will no longer be able to transit the U.S. without a visa.

Since October 2001, some New Zealanders who do not qualify for the Visa Waiver Program (those with convictions, prior overstayers et al.) have needed to apply for a visa in order to visit or transit the United States.

New Zealanders who do not qualify for the VWP will continue to need visas in order to transit or visit the United States. New Zealanders planning to use the VWP are urged to check that they meet the requirements to do so.

Under provisions that came into effect on Friday August 1, 2003 most travelers between the ages of 16 and 60 who need a nonimmigrant visa to travel to or through the United States require a personal interview with a consular officer at the Consulate General in Auckland. In general, those requiring a visa should no longer expect to receive a visa without a personal interview.

The Consulate General in Auckland will expedite processing for those needing visas because of today's announcements. While a personal interview is needed for those affected by today's announcement no appointment is necessary.

If qualified, visas for these applicants will be issued on the spot.

**Consular interview hours are 9:00am-noon and 1:00pm to 3:00pm Monday to Friday at Level 3,
The Citybank Building, 23 Customs St. East, Auckland.
The Consulate's telephone number is (09) 303 27 24.**

It is important that anyone travelling to the United States carefully checks that they comply with current regulations well in advance of their intended travel. The onus is on the traveler to ensure that they have correct documentation.

Anyone in doubt about current regulations should contact the consulate in Auckland with as much lead-time as possible. All applicants are reminded that the earlier they check on U.S. travel requirements, the less inconvenience they may experience.

Please keep in mind that issuance of a visa is never guaranteed. There may be additional processing requirements before a final decision to issue or deny a visa is made. Therefore, we recommend that travelers traveling to or through the U.S. ensure that they have correct travel documentation, including a visa if relevant, prior to purchasing air tickets. We remind travelers that although a visa may be issued, it is not a guarantee of admission to the United States. Immigration inspectors at U.S. ports of entry make that determination.

Provisions in Place to Accommodate Travelers Who were Planning to use the Suspended Programs:

As noted above the consular section in Auckland is prepared to accommodate those travelers who were traveling under **TWOV or ITI** by accepting their visa applications on a priority basis.

In addition there are **three exceptions to accommodate travelers.**

1. TWOV or ITI passengers in flight at the time the regulation went into effect will be allowed to continue in transit and depart the U. S. subject to inspection and an evaluation of risk. (Provision 3 may apply to their return travel.)
2. Travelers who purchased their tickets as TWOV or ITI passengers on or before July 24, 2003, scheduled to depart for transit through the U.S. before 12:01 a.m., Tuesday, August 5, 2003 (EDT), (August 6, 2003 4:01 p.m. NZ time) need not obtain a visa to transit the U.S. For any flights scheduled to depart after 12:01 a.m. August 5 that include a stop in the U.S, however, these travelers must now either obtain a visa or change their travel itinerary to exclude a stop in the U.S.
3. If a person has already traveled through the U.S. as a TWOV or ITI passenger on the first leg of their trip, and uses the return portion of their round trip ticket before 11:00 a.m., August 9, 2003 (EDT), (August 10, 2003 3:00 a.m. N.Z. time) they will be permitted to make a stop in the U.S. without a visa on the return portion of their trip. They will be processed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection inspectors upon arrival in the United States. If they plan to transit the U.S. after that date and time, however, they must either obtain a visa or change their return itinerary to exclude a stop in the U.S.

Additional information about the suspended programs:

The Transit Without Visa program has been in use in the United States since 1952. It applies to passengers who normally would be required to obtain a visa to travel to the United States. Under the TWOV program, passengers arriving in the United States from a foreign country are permitted to travel through the United States to another foreign destination without first obtaining a visa to stop and change planes in the United States. Passengers under the TWOV program go through the full border inspection process upon arrival in the U.S. Under the TWOV program, a passenger may stop at one or two U.S. airports en route to another foreign destination. If on a domestic flight to a second U.S. airport, the airline is responsible for ensuring that the passenger does not illegally enter the United States. Airlines provide contract security escorts and are required to maintain control of the passenger's passport and other travel documents.

The International-to-International transit program also allows passengers arriving from foreign countries to transit through the United States to another foreign destination without first obtaining a visa. Unlike the TWOV program, however, ITI passengers may only transit through one airport, and they may not leave the international transit lounge while connecting planes at that airport.

For further information:

<http://travel.state.gov>

United States State Department travel site including the State Department press release.

<http://www.dhs.gov>

Department of Homeland Security (including a Frequently Asked Questions brochure and a copy of the regulation suspending TWOV program and ITI Program.)

<http://usembassy.org.nz>

The U.S. Embassy in New Zealand website.

Again anyone in any doubt about current regulations should contact the U.S Consulate in Auckland as far in advance as possible. The Consulate's telephone number is (09) 303 27 24. The Consulate does make every attempt to reply to queries promptly, but please understand that the potential volume of calls means that patience may be required.

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