

APPLY NOW?: DHS Announces Pre-Travel Authorization Program for U.S.-Bound Travelers from Visa Waiver Countries.

ESTA is a new electronic system implemented to collect and maintain a record of visitors who want to travel to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program ("VWP").

"Rather than relying on paper-based procedures, this system will leverage 21st century electronic means to obtain basic information about who is traveling to the U.S. without a visa," said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff.

"Getting this information in advance enables our front-line personnel to determine whether a visa-free traveler presents a threat, before boarding an aircraft or arriving on our shores. It is a relatively simple and effective way to strengthen our security, and that of international travelers, while helping to preserve an important program for key allies."

Visa Waiver applicants will not be able to enter the U.S. without an ESTA beginning January 12th, 2009.

You can visit the USCIS website at www.cbp.gov to read more about the ESTA Program. There you can find a FACT SHEET, an ANNOUNCEMENT and an FAQ.

Several questions addressed by the DHS FAQ are:

- What is ESTA? When does ESTA become mandatory for travelers?
- What is the application process for ESTA?
- What are the anticipated ramifications of the implementation of ESTA?
- How does one deal with an ESTA denial?

On August 1st, 2008, DHS will begin to accept voluntary applications through the ESTA website located at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Until ESTA is mandatory for all VWP travelers, ESTA applicants will need to complete an I-94W Form en-route (for presentation at a U.S. Port-of-Entry).