



EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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SUBJECT: Canadians' Perceptions of Border Requirements

SOURCE: Toronto Star

Many Canadians are confused about when a passport is required to enter the United States, even though a majority believe they are aware of current regulations, a new survey suggests.

That could spell trouble at the border if Canadians don't become better informed, in the form of delayed trips and lost business opportunities, said Harris/Decima president Bruce Anderson.

"What these numbers are telling us is that not only do Canadians not all really know what the future rules will be, but most of them feel confident that they do know," he said Sunday in an interview from Ottawa.

"So I think there's some work ahead, obviously, for those who have a need to make sure that Canadians are well informed."

According to the Harris/Decima survey released Sunday, 51 per cent of 1,000 Canadian adults polled said they thought they needed a valid passport to enter the U.S. by sea and 39 per cent believed it was required to cross the border on land.

Still, 66 per cent of the Canadians surveyed said they felt they were aware of current passport regulations for travel to the U.S.

Currently, Canadians only need a passport to enter the U.S. by air. But that's expected to change in the summer of 2008 when passports will also be required at U.S. land and sea entry points.

The new rules are part of the so-called Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative passed by U.S. Congress in 2004 in a bid to plug security holes after the 2001 terrorist attacks. They were supposed to go into effect in January, but last June, U.S. officials issued a reprieve on passports for people entering at land and sea points until at least the following summer.

Ongoing discussions between Canadian and U.S. government officials about passport guidelines could be contributing to the confusion, Anderson said. Usually, people pay more attention to such policy matters when there's an active debate.

"Given that that debate has been going on for a couple of years, I might have expected more Canadians to be familiar with what the rules of the road were going to be," he said.

Canada has been lobbying American officials to endorse high-technology driver's licences as alternatives to passports, saying the plan to require passports is already seriously denting tourism and could damage trade.

Ottawa is also considering whether to devise a passport card like the one the United States is developing that would cost less but provide the same proof of identity and citizenship.

A current alternative to a passport when travelling by air to the U.S. is a NEXUS card. Low-risk, pre-approved frequent travellers can obtain the card for \$80, which can help them move quickly through the border clearance process.

The kiosks are already operating in airports in Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary and Winnipeg. The program was initiated in February, and has over 130,000 members.

The survey also found that 42 per cent of those polled did not have a valid Canadian passport. Ontario had the highest number of passport holders at 65 per cent and Alberta the lowest at 38 per cent.

The confusion about passports could also hurt the U.S. tourism industry, which is reaping the benefits of the high Canadian dollar.

"They may not be able to realize the full benefit of that currency fluctuation until Canadians are really well-informed," Anderson said.

The survey, commissioned by Disney Parks Canada, was conducted between Oct. 25 and Oct. 29. Results are accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.