



INFORMATION BULLETIN

DATE: October 5, 2009

SUBJECT: Michigan Enhanced DLs

SOURCE: Chicago Tribune

Despite security concerns raised by some opponents of enhanced driver's licenses, Michigan residents have requested more than 80,000 of the high-tech cards since the secretary of state's office first started accepting applications six months ago.

That's just over 1 percent of Michigan's 7.1 million registered motorists -- a good showing, the state says, for a voluntary program that costs \$20 more than a regular license.

Enhanced licenses and personal identification cards let people re-enter **the United States** from Canada, **Mexico**, Bermuda and 17 Caribbean nations in compliance with stricter government regulations for land and sea border crossing that took effect June 1.

Michigan is among a handful of border states -- the others are New York, **Vermont** and **Washington** -- that offer enhanced licenses as an option to traditional ones.

The new cards, which are available only to Michigan residents who are U.S. citizens, make it faster and easier for travelers to cross borders, Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land said Friday.

"We're very excited about how many people have taken advantage of this opportunity to get an enhanced driver's license because it's just more convenient," she said. "Folks are able to cross the border between Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean without having to get a passport."

Before the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a driver's license and an oral declaration of citizenship were all that a motorist needed to be allowed into the U.S. from its neighboring countries.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 created the Western

Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which requires all travelers to present passports or other documents as proof of identity and citizenship when entering the United States.

The requirement for re-entering the country by air went into effect in January 2007.

The **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** has pushed for states to offer enhanced driver's licenses and personal ID cards that provide identity as well as citizenship information. As of Sept. 25, the state had received applications for 80,940 of the licenses and 4,748 of the ID cards for a total of 85,688 applications since April, said Kelly Chesney, a Land spokeswoman.

The state is now receiving an average of about 1,000 applications daily, she said. Residents usually receive their new cards in the mail within two to three weeks of applying.

An enhanced license costs \$45 new and \$38 to renew while an enhanced ID card costs \$30. A regular license costs \$25 new and \$18 to renew while a regular ID card costs \$10.

An enhanced driver's license is embedded with a microchip attached to a wire antenna that transmits a unique identifier when detected by an electromagnetic reader. The paper-thin configuration is known as a radio frequency identification, or RFID, tag. The tags were added to U.S. passports in 2006.

A tag transmits only a random number that corresponds to records stored in government databases, which officials say are secure but opponents say could be hacked.

As vehicles approach border crossings, scanners at the posts detect the cards before they come to a stop -- even when inside wallets and purses. Within moments, a computer provides border guards with photos of the card holders in the vehicle and their personal and citizenship information.

As more drivers are issued enhanced licenses, traffic will move more quickly through border crossings, said Ron Smith, a Detroit-based spokesman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, a Homeland Security agency.

"I know that we're seeing them at the border and I know some officers that have actually gone out and gotten them," Smith said.

State Rep. Paul Opsommer, R-Dewitt, who is vice chair of the House Transportation Committee, opposes the enhanced licenses. They carry cost, security and privacy concerns, he said.

"They said it will allow people to get through the border faster, but I think it puts efficiency over security," Opsommer wrote in an e-mail to The Associated Press.

"Technology is our friend, but we need to really examine how much we want our government to be able to track us before we let all these programs go through in an unexamined manner."

Land said because RFID tags transmit no personal data, she had no security worries about the cards.

"All it is, is a random number the feds have assigned, and if someone could read it, all they'd get is that random number," she said. "It only works when connected to the feds' system."

Ronnie Sink, a dispatcher for Rochester Limousine in Rochester Hills, a Detroit suburb, said the service -- which frequently takes passengers into Windsor and other Ontario destinations -- requires its drivers to have enhanced chauffeur's licenses.

"It definitely helps them get through more quickly," Sink said.