

New US visa requirements for Landed Immigrants

By Nan Berezowski

TORONTO – The United States is going ahead with new visa requirements expected to affect more than half a million Canadian Permanent Residents. Landed Immigrants from over 50 countries including Pakistan, India and Bangladesh will soon need visas to enter the US. At present they can cross the border as freely as Canadian citizens.

According to the U.S. government, the new visa requirement is required to increase security and safeguard the United States. The U.S. government's position

is that the new rule reflects the high security risk of people coming from countries where document fraud and abuse is high. Last November, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham said he would encourage the U.S. to back off the proposed visa rule. Although Canada has lobbied against these visa requirements, the regulatory change, which came



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under consideration in the aftermath of September 11, 2002 will become reality on March 17, 2003. As Consular authorities anticipate an enormous increase in the number of visa applicants, and all applicants will undergo security checks, visa processing is expected to take up to two months.

Although the Consulate advises against contacting them for information, early indicators are that in some instances they will exercise discretion in order to assist those with immediate travel plans. As well, in some cases it may be possible to apply for the visa in advance of March 17.

Make no mistake; citizens of the above listed countries will soon need visas to visit or work in the US. Without a visa endorsement in their passport many Canadian Permanent Residents will be turned back at US-Canada border inspection and airport Pre-Flight Inspection facilities.

In order to avoid this inconvenient and stressful scenario, a carefully prepared and completed visa application with accompanying documentation should be submitted to the US Consulate with jurisdiction over the applicant's place of residence without delay. For those anticipating travel to the US, for pleasure, business or work, it is best to plan ahead.

Long term planning is also a consideration. For instance, Canadian Permanent Residents may also wish to investigate their eligibility for Canadian Citizenship. In addition to the regular benefits and responsibilities of Citizenship, naturalized Canadian citizens will not be subjected to the new visa requirements.

However, as a new, tougher Canadian Citizenship act is in the works, the best time to consider making a Citizenship application may well be now, before the law changes.

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