



**Homeland
Security**

Fact Sheet

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REAL ID

THE REAL ID ACT OF 2005: A CORE 9/11 COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, members of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, commonly referred to as the 9/11 Commission, examined a numerous issues pertaining to homeland security and made specific recommendations on how to protect our nation against future attacks.

Of particular note, the 9/11 Commission recommended that the U.S. improve its system for issuing identification documents. The Commission specifically urged the Federal government to “set standards for the issuance of sources of identification, such as driver’s licenses.”

State-issued driver’s licenses serve many purposes in today’s society, including being the primary identity document used by individuals attempting to access Federally-regulated commercial aircraft, opening a checking account, or any other activity that requires proof of identification. As we saw on September 11, 2001, terrorists are aware of this and actively seek this form of identification (ID) which allows them to function in society virtually undetected.

The 9/11 Commission noted that, “For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons...” Eighteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers carried some form of government-issued ID, mostly state driver’s licenses, many of which were obtained fraudulently. In the planning stages for the attacks, these documents were used to rent vehicles, evade law enforcement, enroll in flight school, and board airplanes on that fateful day.

Congress responded by passing the REAL ID Act of 2005. REAL ID is a nationwide effort to improve the integrity and security of state issued driver’s licenses and IDs, which in turn will help fight terrorism and reduce fraud.

REAL ID SETS MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR STATE-ISSUED LICENSES, IDs

REAL ID sets minimum standards for state issued driver’s licenses and IDs. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is currently working with state and territorial Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to improve the security of their state-issued driver’s

licenses and IDs and meet the requirements of the REAL ID Act thus increasing the security and integrity of these documents. The minimum standards include measures such as:

- Only accept certain types of documents to verify a person's identity (such as birth certificates and passports)
- States shall use systems for electronic validation of documents and identity data
- States must verify the applicants social security number with Social Security Administration
- States must verify the applicant has presented satisfactory evidence of lawful status in the United States;
- States must have security plans for card production facilities and materials and must require background checks for all persons who are involved in the production or manufacture of driver's licenses and identification cards referred to as covered DMV employees
- The card itself must meet certain security features to prevent tampering, counterfeiting and duplication; and include specific information on the face of the card and in the machine readable zone.

THE BENEFITS OF REAL ID: COMBATING TERRORISM AND IDENTITY THEFT

Using a REAL ID increases confidence that people are who they say they are. As a result, the Nation will have in place more reliable safeguards against terrorism and identity theft while still maintaining individual privacy. Specifically, REAL ID:

- Makes it more difficult to steal other people's identities and use them to obtain driver's licenses for use in illicit activity;
- Helps cut down on identity theft by establishing layers of security to ensure that identity documents are issued to the appropriate individuals;
- Requires electronic verification of data on identity documents, which makes it more difficult to create a fictitious identity using false documents;
- Makes it easier for law enforcement officials to detect documents that have been falsified;
- Establishes safeguards for storing personal information that DMVs must follow when issuing REAL ID compliant identity documents; and.
- Ensures that states and territories retain their function as issuing authorities.

PREVIOUS AND UPCOMING MILESTONES

Pursuant to the REAL ID Act, if an individual chooses to present a state-issued driver's license or ID for an official purpose as of May 11, 2008, that driver's license or ID must be issued by a REAL ID compliant state. Official purposes include: accessing a Federal facility, boarding Federally-regulated commercial aircraft, entering nuclear power plants and other purposes as established by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

DHS recognized that states could not feasibly meet the full requirements of the Act by May 11, 2008 and, therefore, offered all states and jurisdictions an opportunity to request an extension

until December 31, 2009. Many states have already taken proactive steps consistent with REAL ID implementation or have made commitments to improve their licensing systems.

Based on the security improvement actions or commitments of the states and jurisdictions, DHS granted REAL ID extensions to all 56 U.S. jurisdictions. This extension is intended to ensure that driver's licenses and IDs across the country will achieve a higher security standard and that all state-issued driver's licenses and IDs will continue to be accepted for official purposes through the end of 2009.

Jurisdictions which received an initial extension until December 31, 2009 but do not believe they will reach full compliance by that date may file a request for an additional extension by submitting a *Material Compliance Checklist* to DHS no later than October 11, 2009. States that demonstrate they have achieved the required 18 material compliance benchmarks resulting in increased security of their credentials and licensing processes will automatically be granted a second extension until May 11, 2011 to complete full implementation of REAL ID.

DHS is a committed partner and will continue to work with states throughout the REAL ID implementation process.