

Document Security Provisions: What's in the Cards?

In the debate over comprehensive immigration reform legislation, one area of agreement is the need for secure documents for immigrants and US workers. Such documents might include tamper-resistant Social Security cards for US workers or machine-readable, biometric, and tamper-resistant travel documents for foreign nationals on US visas.

The table that follows outlines the security features of documents currently used by US residents, particularly those used for travel, work authorization, and to verify identity. These include passports, Social Security cards, permanent resident cards, employment authorization cards, and state driver's licenses.

Most of these documents include basic protections such as lamination and inclusion of the holder's full name, photograph, and date of birth. The Social Security card is the least secure; it is the only document at present that lacks any type of photograph, does not include a date of birth, and is not laminated. Pending legislation in Congress would require major changes to Social Security cards; the Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy (STRIVE) Act (H.R.1645) and the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (S.1348) would require Social Security cards to include security features designed to prevent tampering, counterfeiting, or duplication, and to be machine readable. New cards must also contain features that make the card fraud-resistant, tamper-resistant, and wear-resistant, and be made of plastic or similar material instead of the standard banknote paper that has been used since 1983.

Most current documents include added security features. New passports have digital photographs, digital signature technology, and computer chips, rather than the glued photos and handwritten signatures of past versions. Permanent Resident Cards now contain biometric identifiers, magnetic strips, and holograms. The REAL-ID Act of 2005 requires new driver's licenses to have digital photographs and electronic signatures by December 2009, at the latest.

Changes in travel authorization documents are also underway; proposed legislation would require every immigrant travel authorization document issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to be machine readable, tamper-resistant, and include a biometric identifier by December 31, 2008.

Security Features of Commonly Used US Government Documents

	biometric identifier ¹	non-digital photo	electronic signature	handwritten signature	full name	partial name	date of birth	place of birth	computer chip	machine readable	hologram	laminated	Social Security number	years valid
Department of State														
passport (non-electronic) ^{2,14}	P			X	X		X	X		X	X	X		10 ¹⁰
electronic passport (effective 8/14/06) ³	P		X ⁹	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		10 ¹⁰
border crossing card/laser visa (effective 10/1/01) ^{4,15}	P, F				X		X	X		X	X	X		10
Social Security Administration														
Social Security card ⁵				X	X ¹¹	X ¹¹							X	no expiration
Social Security card ("Valid for Work Only with DHS Authorization")				X	X	X							X	revoked if work authorization ends
Social Security card ("Not Valid for Employment")				X	X	X							X	no expiration
Department of Homeland Security⁶														
I-551 Resident Alien Card (issued 1977-1989) ¹⁶	F	X		X	X		X					X		no expiration
I-551 Resident Alien Card ¹⁶ (revised 8/89 and 1/92, issued until 1997) ⁷	F	X			X		X					X		10
I-551 Permanent Resident Card (effective 12/97-current) ¹⁶	P, F					X	X	X		X	X	X		10 ¹³
I-688 Temporary Resident Card (IRCA amnesties)	F	X		X		X	X	X				X		varies
I-688A Employment Authorization Card (IRCA amnesties, was replaced by I-766)	F	X		X		X	X					X		varies
I-688B Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (non-permanent residents) (effective 5/95) ²	P, F		X			X	X					X		varies
I-766 EAD (effective 1/97) ²	P, F		X			X	X	X		X		X		typically valid up to one year
50 States														
driver license/state ID (prior to REAL-ID)	P	X	X		X		X			varies	varies	X	X ¹²	varies
driver license/state ID (post REAL-ID) ⁸	P		X		X		X			X	X	X		varies

Notes:

1. P indicates a digital photo is included, F indicates a fingerprint is included. A biometric identifier is an objective measurement of a physical characteristic of an individual that, when captured in a database, can be used to verify identity or check against other entries in the database.
2. Reflects characteristics of the documents currently being issued, previous versions still in circulation may not possess all of the same security features.
3. Only available from select Passport Agency locations; non-electronic passports continue to be issued and remain valid for ten years from the date of issue. In addition to its other features, every electronic passport has a unique, laser-engraved sequential serial number.
4. Issued to Mexican nationals. Laser visas issued prior to 10/1/01 are no longer valid. Section 104 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 (P.L. 104-208) requires that every Border Crossing Card (BCC) issued after April 1, 1998, contain a biometric identifier such as a fingerprint, and be machine-readable.
5. The Social Security Administration has issued over 50 versions of the Social Security Card, all of which are currently valid. The Social Security Amendments of 1983 (P.L. 98-21) require cards issued after October 30, 1983 to be made of banknote paper to make them harder to counterfeit. Beginning in April 2007, all cards issued have the date of issue printed under the signature line in MM/DD/YYYY format.
6. Documents issued prior to March 1, 2003 were created and issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).
7. Versions with an expiration date will go out of circulation during 2007.
8. The Real ID Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-13) requires all states to issue cards that contain an encrypted, machine-readable identification strip, and a biometric identifier (digital photo). They must also possess physical security features (such as holograms) designed to prevent tampering, counterfeiting, or duplication by May 2008. If needed, states may apply for an extension until December 2009. All existing non-compliant licenses and ID cards must be reissued by May 11, 2013.

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9. Contains digital signature technology, a process that employs an algorithm that transforms the signature into an unintelligible form and establishes a key for verifying the signature or returning it to its original form.
10. Valid five years for children age 15 and under.
11. The name shown on the card must agree with the name shown on the document submitted as evidence of identity, regardless of whether it is the individual's full or partial name.
12. May not apply to all states.
13. Valid two years for Conditional Permanent Residents.
14. Over 74 million Americans had passports as of March 2007, according to State Department data.
15. The State Department is working with DHS to develop the Peoples Access Security Services (PASS) card that will allow for US citizens without a passport to enter the United States from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda through land and sea ports.
16. Commonly known as the "Green Card."

Sources: US Department of State, www.state.gov; Passports, http://travel.state.gov/passport/fri/faq/faq_1741.html#valid; Laser Visas, http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1266.html; Social Security Administration, www.ssa.gov; Social Security Card, <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10002.html>, *Social Security Card History*, <https://s044a90.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0100201065!opendocument>; US Citizenship and Immigration Services, www.uscis.gov; Employment Authorization Documents, <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnnextoid=1847c9ee2f82b010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=1847c9ee2f82b010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD>; *A Guide to Selected U.S. Travel and Identity Documents*, US Department of Justice, www.detectfraud.com/travel_and_identity_documents.pdf.

This information was compiled by MPI Researcher Dawn Konet in June 2007. For questions or to arrange an interview with an MPI expert on immigration, please contact Colleen Coffey, Director of Communications, at (202) 266-1910 or ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

For more information on immigration to the United States and worldwide, visit the Migration Information Source, MPI's online publication, at www.migrationinformation.org. The Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and analysis of international migration trends.

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