

## Passports to be required for travel within the Americas

Contributed by Cati Vanden Breul, Minnesota Daily (U. Minnesota)

(U-WIRE) MINNEAPOLIS -- Taking a spur-of-the-moment fishing trip to Canada or a spring-break excursion to Mexico may require more planning as early as next year.

U.S. citizens are currently required to present a birth certificate and form of photo identification, such as a valid driver's license, to cross into Canada and Mexico.

But as of Jan. 1, 2008, all U.S. citizens traveling between the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Bermuda will need to present a valid U.S. passport. Under the proposed time line, passports will be required as of January 2007 for air travel between the countries, and in January 2008 for all cross-border travel.

Congress passed the new rules in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

"The main idea is to increase security along the border," said Steven Royster, a U.S. State Department spokesman.

He said the number of U.S. citizens applying for passports is increasing as people learn about the new requirement.

"We've made great efforts to spread this information by talking to media outlets and speaking to industry officials," Royster said.

Mike Kurth, a University of Minnesota accounting, finance and economics senior who travels regularly to Canada for fishing trips with his friends and family, said he is planning to get a passport so he can continue to cross the border at International Falls.

He'll also need it for his trip to Mexico over spring break.

Over the past eight years, Kurth's made at least seven trips to Canada, and said he observed it's "not very tough to get in."

"It's usually just really quick; we always have a birth certificate and driver's license ready. We say we're going fishing and when we're coming back, and they say 'OK, enjoy yourself,'" Kurth said.

He said he likes the idea of requiring passports because it will increase security at the border.

Although the idea behind the requirement is likely to keep terrorists from crossing into the United States, its effectiveness is questionable, said University law professor Dale Carpenter.

"The argument against (requiring passports) is that it won't really increase border security very much, since people can always obtain fake passports or get across the border in numerous other ways," he said.

The requirement could also produce a negative economic effect because travelers will have to purchase passports if they don't have them already, Carpenter said. Passports cost \$97 for citizens 16 or older and \$82 for younger Americans. Applications usually take about six weeks to process.

"It will also slow down land crossings, which will reduce the efficiency of commerce," Carpenter said.

But, after an initial adjustment period, people will likely get used to the new requirements and things will return to normal, he said.

"The post-9/11 security environment has required a lot of adjustments and security requirements of travelers," Carpenter said. "This is just another in a long list."

Public relations junior Cydney Wuerffel, who is going to Mexico over spring break, said she won't mind getting a passport before she travels in March.

"I might as well get one now, when it's required, since I'll probably travel internationally sooner or later," Wuerffel said. The State and Homeland Security departments have also proposed a wallet-size passport card that would cost \$45 for adults and speed up border crossings for those who travel frequently by land or sea among the United States, Canada,

Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda.