

Time frame set for application for machine-readable passports

All applicants who are applying for machine-readable passports are advised that their application will be treated like it was the very first time that they are applying for a passport.

According to assistant commissioner of crime and immigration Vernon Francois, the reason for this is because the island's passport stock has been contaminated. There are persons who got illegal access to passports and therefore the department does not want to give those persons the opportunity to apply for a machine-readable passport just by using the old passport.

“What we have done is to treat each application like it was the first,” said Francois. “We have asked for birth certificates specifically, marriage certificates if married, divorce documents if divorced, documents to show change of name and social security number.” Francois said there are presently hundreds of applications in the system for machine-readable passports and the department has set a time frame within which people can apply for passports.

Between March 2007 and October 2007 the department will be looking at first time applicants, one year renewals. that is people who have paid moneys for an additional year on their passports and expired, damaged and lost passports. from November 2007 to December 2008 the department will issue passports to people with US visas and applications with proof of US visa appointments.

The reason why the department will deal with applicants who have US visas is because there is an arrangement, which will be verified in due time whereby the US will not be accepting people without machine readable passports by January 2008. The system which is in place now concerning people with old passports which contain US visas is that they will have to travel with that passport as well as their machine-readable passport. It is hoped that by January 2009 everyone has a machine-readable passport.

Francois affirmed that the machine-readable passports are extremely secure. The make up of the passport are different with various security features, which will not be disclosed to the public. He added that access would be restricted to the production area of the passports. Passports will be issued in three categories, three different colors: for official people who travel regularly (government operatives), diplomats and regular people. Previously the missions and consulates overseas could have issued St Lucian passports. Now, all passports will be issued from St Lucia.

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