

New driver's license rules kick in early

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Body

The state of Florida has hustled to impose **new** anti-terrorism **rules** that make it harder for noncitizens to get Florida **drivers' licenses**.

The **rules** originally were to change next week, but state **licensing** offices have been swamped with immigrants rushing to get **drivers' licenses** before the **new rules** take effect.

So the state changed the **rules** Thursday.
LICENSES15

"Word had gotten around, and we were beginning to see a stampede of people eager to get **licenses** under the old procedures," said Robert Sanchez, spokesman for the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. "So we switched to the **new** procedure ahead of schedule."

The stampede happened in South Florida, where long lines and confusion greeted scores of immigrants trying to get **licenses** in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. The situation in the Tampa Bay area wasn't that extreme.

The changes are intended to make it harder for would-be terrorists to blend in. At least 13 of the 19 terrorists involved in the Sept. 11 attacks had Florida ID cards or driving permits.

Under the **new rules**, noncitizens in Florida's high-population areas must go to specific **licensing** offices to get **drivers' licenses** or ID cards. Staffers at those offices have been trained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to recognize altered or fake documents, Sanchez said.

In Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, residents who are not U.**S.** or Canadian citizens are allowed to go to only one office in each county. The Pinellas office is at 6855 62nd Ave. N in Pinellas Park. For an appointment, call (727) 547-7687. The Hillsborough office is at 4100 W. Martin Luther King Blvd. in Tampa. Call (813) 871-7375 for an appointment.

In less populated counties, such as Citrus, Hernando and Pasco, noncitizens can go to any **licensing** office.

Before, anyone with the proper documents could walk into a **licensing** office and walk out with a permit or ID the same day. Now, noncitizens receive a 30-day temporary paper permit. During that time, an applicant's documents are copied and cross-checked with immigration authorities. If everything matches, the state will mail the applicant a **license**.

Also, under the **new rules**, a noncitizen's driving permit will expire at the same time his or her visa expires.

Gov. Jeb Bush said Friday that noncitizens shouldn't get **drivers' licenses** that expire after their visas, so he ordered the **rules** changed.

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- The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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