

TAMPER-PROOF GREEN CARDS ON WAY

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Body

Starting next week, thousands of immigrant New Yorkers waiting for their green cards will receive new permits with anti-forgery safeguards built in.

About 40,000 immigrants nationwide, many frustrated by delays of six months or more, will start receiving the plastic cards after a formal announcement by the Immigration and Naturalization Service set for Tuesday, an INS official said.

The permits, delayed by months of production problems, are the first issued in a government effort to shut down a booming underground market in phony green cards.

"They've finally straightened out all the glitches and are sending the cards out," said Allen Kaye, a Manhattan immigration lawyer who was briefed on the plan. "This is going to make a lot of anxious people very happy."

Count Lena among them. The Romanian immigrant said she's been awaiting her green card since October. The delay forced her to rely on a temporary passport stamp allowing her to work and travel.

"It's a problem because employers and authorities say they want to see the green card, not a stamp," said the Brooklyn resident who requested anonymity.

An INS official touted the cards as virtually tamper-proof.

Along with the regular color photograph, they feature a laser-created holograph on the back with an identical image of the card holder for easy checking by an employer, said Jerome Drexler, head of the California firm supplying 4 million cards to the government.

The holograph is designed to stymie forgers who in some cases have simply pasted a new photo over the original.

The cards also have a computer strip encoded with identification data, he said.

Other hard-to-copy safeguards come into view under a magnifying glass, including portraits of each U.S. President, flags of the 50 states and images of the U.S. flag and Statue of Liberty.

The new cards are off-white with the green computer strip. The current permits are pink and haven't been green since the 1960s.

"It would be almost impossible for someone to duplicate them. They would have to use many different technologies to do it," Drexler added.

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About 10 million legal aliens live in the U.S. But they won't have to get the new cards immediately. Instead, they will pay \$ 75 per renewal as their existing cards expire during the next decade.

The new permits were scheduled to debut three months ago. But production problems arose at an INS plant in Vermont, creating the long backlog.

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