

*Immigrants now may check case status online;*  
**OFFICIALS SAY SERVICE WILL REDUCE WAITING**

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## **Body**

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The Immigration and Naturalization **Service now** allows non-citizens to **check** the **status** of their pending applications **online** for the first time, easing one of the agency's worst bottlenecks.

The **service**, which went **online** last week, should save hundreds of thousands of **immigrants** the hours of **waiting** it previously took to **check** on the **status** of applications for citizenship, green cards and other matters by telephone or by visiting INS offices, agency **officials said**.

This could also help ease some of the long lines outside the INS office in San Jose, where hundreds line up every day -- many to **check** on the **status** of their applications.

The **service** can be used, however, only by people who have received a receipt number for their application from one of the four INS **service** centers, in California, Nebraska, Texas and Vermont.

"We think this **will reduce** the number of customers who need to call or go to their local offices to get this information," **said** a spokesman for the agency, Bill Strassberger.

The **online service** was welcome news at the San Jose office of U.S. Rep. Mike Honda, where 60 percent of the people who came to the office looking for help with the INS simply wanted to learn the **status** of pending applications, which often take months or even years to be processed.

"This is a big deal," **said** Cathy Hyde, Honda's constituent **services** director in San Jose. "Earlier, the process to get a **status check** could take as much as 30 days."

Ravi Simhambhatla of San Jose used the site to get an update on his **case** this week. Ravi and his wife have been awaiting approval for their green cards -- a process that began nearly two years ago.

"This gives me the ability to get a **check** when I want to and not have to **wait** for hours to get an answer on the 800 number or at the INS office in San Jose," Simhambhatla **said**.

The **service** is not likely to be much help to people with complicated applications, cautioned Richard Konda, executive director for the Asian Law Alliance, a non-profit law center that provides free or low-cost law **services** in Santa Clara County.

"This **will** be of help to some, but many people who come to us for help **will** probably not benefit because their **cases** have been pending for a very long time," he **said**.

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## IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

To **check** the **status** of applications **online**, go the INS Web site at <https://egov.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/cris/jsps/index.jsp>. People who do not have a receipt can still get an update at a local office or by calling the National Customer **Service** Center at (800) 375-5283.

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