

New rules for driver's licenses will begin

Saint Paul Pioneer Press (Minnesota)

July 7, 2002 Sunday

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Section: MAIN; Pg. 1A; news

Length: 577 words

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Body

The line on a typical day at the **driver's license** station on University Avenue in St. Paul is a pretty good reflection of Minnesota's **new drivers**.

Someone who needs to take the test in Spanish stands near a **new** immigrant from Cambodia, an African-born woman wearing traditional garb waits in the crowded station next to someone who could be a Wisconsinite trading in his Badger state **license**.

Starting Monday, people like these -- citizens and immigrants alike -- **will** have to jump through at least one more hoop to get their **licenses**, and some immigrants **will** get cards that distinguish them from citizens.

An out-of-state **driver's license will** no longer be enough for **new** Minnesotans to prove their identity. Everyone **will** have to show another government-issued document, such as a passport or a birth certificate, and prove that they are allowed to be in the United States.

"What we need to see is at least two forms of identification," said Brian Lamb, director of the vehicle services division of the Public Safety Department. Minnesota **drivers** renewing their **licenses** won't be affected.

For temporary immigrants, clerks at **driver's license** counters **will** use the documentation to create special **licenses** that bear the date by which the immigrant is supposed to leave the country, and the words "status check" **will** appear on the front and back of the **license**.

People who were born elsewhere but have permanent legal residence in the country would not have any special designation on their **licenses**.

Temporary immigrants **will** still get **licenses** valid for four years. But about 60 days before their legal stay is up, they **will** get a letter saying they must talk to state **driver's** officials or their **license will** be canceled once their legal stay has expired.

People with permission from the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service to stay longer, or those who have applied for that permission, can have their **licenses** extended.

If law enforcement officials see someone with an expired "status check" date, they could and would call the INS, said Public Safety Commissioner Charlie Weaver. That **will** make the state safer, he said.

"What we need to do to fight terrorism is a coordinated system. We all need to work together," Weaver said.

Minnesota lawmakers considered similar **driver's license** measures this year and rejected them. Senate Democrats, who were opposed to specifying immigrant status on **driver's licenses**, and House Republicans, who

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backed the idea, could not agree. Weaver sought and received an administrative law judge's permission to change the rules without legislative action.

House members and Weaver said making driver's licenses provisions tougher and giving police officers the tip that they might be dealing with someone who is in the country illegally would help keep the country safe.

Senate members and immigrant groups said the driver's license measures would have little impact on terrorism and would only make immigrants targets of harassment. Some of the state's biggest employers, including Cargill and the Mayo Clinic, also objected to the provisions.

A majority of state legislatures that considered creating tougher driver's license provisions for immigrants rejected the proposals, said Tyler Moran of the National Immigration Law Center. She said there was a feeling that changing driver's licenses would offer a false security blanket, and "real security takes real hard work."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); DRIVERS LICENSES (90%); LICENSES & PERMITS (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (84%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (78%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (77%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (77%); CITIZENSHIP (77%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (72%); LITIGATION (62%); TERRORISM (50%); JUDGES (50%)

Organization: PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT (58%)

Industry: DRIVERS LICENSES (90%)

Geographic: MINNESOTA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: July 7, 2002