

## LOCAL INS PAPERS ON HIGH-TECH HOLD

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### **Body**

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Thousands of applications at the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in New York were held up this week after a post-Sept. 11 rule requiring new security checks went into effect.

The reason: Few INS employees had been trained, and only one computer terminal was compatible with the new technology at the local office, one of the busiest in the nation, a federal official acknowledged.

It was unknown yesterday how long an immigrant would have to wait to complete a naturalization process, obtain a green card or get travel and work authorization documents.

"This is causing huge nightmares," said Marcia Needleman, president of the local chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "How can they implement a change without the proper resources?"

Immigrants who showed up for long-awaited appointments were turned away with a form letter signed by New York District Director Edward McElroy, explaining the district was unable to complete any applications and petitions because of procedures "imposed" from national headquarters.

"I'm disappointed," said one man, a 42-year-old Korean immigrant from Queens who went to 26 Federal Plaza on Thursday to get his temporary green card stamped onto his passport.

Next week, a team from Washington is scheduled to arrive in the city to train local employees and set up more computer terminals to run names on the Interagency Border Inspection System, said national INS spokesman Bill Strassberger.

"They only had one terminal, and we're working to increase that," he said. "The nation's security is our top priority."

Security database

The integrated database, which is in use at airports and other border crossings, provides an array of crosschecks of information from the INS, FBI, Customs Service, Border Patrol and other federal agencies. Before Monday, district INS workers ran only an applicant's fingerprints for criminal history, Strassberger said.

Margie McHugh, director of the New York Immigration Coalition, said immigration experts weren't sure how the new process would improve national security.

"This is just a knee-jerk reaction from Washington, and it is going to potentially make processing so much slower for millions of applicants around the country without any clear gains for public security," she said.

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