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Winter Olympics will highlight new U.S. border requirements

By Matthew Daneman, USA TODAY

When the [2010 Winter Olympic Games](#) start in Vancouver on Feb. 12, they not only will draw athletes from across the globe but legions of citizens from the USA — all of whom will need to present newly required forms of identification to cross the border.

In anticipation of that, and in the face of criticism of the increased documentation requirements and costs for cross-border travel that went into effect last June, the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) has launched a \$2 million marketing campaign to remind people in the Northwest about identification options for border crossings.

Last month, the department began targeting Washington, Idaho and [Oregon](#) with radio, television, print and Internet ads, said Joanne Ferreira, public affairs officer with Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection office.

The ads, featuring Olympians such as skier [Bill Demong](#), include reminders that identity documentation will be required to return to the USA and direct people to [GetYouHome.gov](#), a Homeland Security travel website, to find out about the various document options, several of which are less expensive than obtaining a passport.

The Olympics-centered campaign is part of an ongoing effort by Homeland Security to publicize ways of crossing the border in light of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative rules, which since June 1 have required American citizens to have a passport, passport card or enhanced driver's license or to be enrolled in a trusted traveler program such as NEXUS and SENTRI (for frequent travelers to Canada and Mexico respectively) or FAST (for commercial drivers) in order to get back into the USA from Canada or Mexico.

The change also began requiring Canadians to have a passport, enhanced driver's license or trusted traveler program card for getting into the USA. It did not change the similar documentation Mexican citizens already were required to show.

Some business owners who depend on customers crossing the border have been hurt by the tougher crossing rules.

At Martin's General Store in the northern Vermont town of Highgate Springs, 3 miles from the Canadian border, most of owner Gilbert Gagner's gas business came from Canadians crossing into the U.S. to fuel up at cheaper prices. But no longer.

More than two-thirds of his gas customers have disappeared since more stringent border-crossing rules went into effect, Gagner says. The problem, he says, is that the stricter rules cause lengthy delays as folks wait for [U.S. Border Patrol](#) agents to clear them into Vermont, and people on both sides of the crossing have run out of patience.

In June and July, the first two months of the new requirements, 10.4 million vehicles drove into the USA from Canada, down from 11.8 million for the same June-July span in 2008, according to Customs and Border Protection numbers. The new requirements are likely not the sole cause of the decreased traffic, Ferreira says. "It could be the economy, the weather, the exchange rate," she says.

At the privately owned Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, Canada, all traffic, including commercial trucks, passenger cars and buses, was down 13% over 2008 through the end of November, according to Detroit International Bridge Co., which owns the span

But passenger car traffic exceeded 2008 levels in September, October and November, company spokesman Phil Frame says.

U.S.-Mexican border traffic has also declined. For the first seven months of 2009, 81.2 million vehicles drove into the USA through its southern border, compared with 92.6 million in the same span in 2008, according to Customs and Border Protection figures.

Kenn Morris, of Crossborder Group, a border research firm in San Diego, says that U.S. day-trippers into Tijuana have fallen 40% to 60% since 2008.

Passports are a significant part of the problem, he said. "Most people don't have passports. When they find out about the requirement, they decide not to go."

Daneman reports for the [Democrat](#) and [Chronicle](#) in Rochester, N.Y.

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