

In 2009, DHS expects some New Faces, Same Deadlines

Posted At : June 30, 2008 10:49 AM | Posted By : Lindsey Paul

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Much has already been written about the effect of the upcoming Presidential election on the Department of Homeland Security – namely that it will be the five-year old department's **first transition**. Will there be **career officials** in place to instill institutional memory? Will the Department respond in the face of increased threats of terrorism that so many of our allies have faced in similar transitions? Congress has even **threatened to subpoena** DHS' transition plans. What's more, DHS' most high profile programs have milestones or deadlines occurring early in the new administration.

TWIC

The first major deadline comes in April 2009, when all workers with access to secure areas of U.S. ports must be enrolled in the Transportation Worker Identification Credential program (TWIC). Workers may pre-enroll **online**, but must visit a regional enrollment center to complete the identification process. In total, approximately 300,000 workers have fully enrolled out of an estimated 1.5 million who need the credentials. After discussions with the port community, DHS allowed for a seven-month extension of the original September 2008.

US-VISIT

With the close of public comments on June 23, DHS must now finalize its plan for moving forward with the exit portion of its US-VISIT mandate, also known as the US Visitor and Immigration Status Indication Technology System. DHS proposed a requirement for airlines to collect biometric information on foreign travelers when leaving the country. Despite significant criticism from industry, DHS could move forward with its plans or re-evaluate. Additionally, the department recently released a **RFI** to industry for GovWin on how to implement a tracking strategy for exits at land ports of entry. Regardless, Congress mandated that DHS has until June 2009 to implement an exit strategy or risk losing its Visa Waiver Program.

WHTI

Also in June 2009, DHS must be equipped to enforce new border regulations known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. WHTI represents a higher level of border security with requirements for travelers to present government-issued passports or similar cards equipped with radio frequency identification (RFID) chips. In addition to installing personnel and technology for this process, DHS is faced with challenges in notifying the public of these changes; otherwise, major disruptions to the industry could occur, particularly along the U.S.-Canadian border.

DHS has already encountered significant challenges in its five year history, but will it be ready to charge into 2009 with a new President as well as a new Secretary? So far, things are looking up, as the department places career officials such as **Elaine Duke** into key positions to bring consistency at a time of change. With key programs finally coming to fruition after much debate and oversight, 2009 will be a landmark year either way.