



AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES NEWSLETTER
U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL HONG KONG
September 2004

Through the monthly American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consulate General provides security and other information of general interest to U.S. citizens in Hong Kong and Macau who have subscribed by registering with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and providing an email address or fax number.

If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to receive our monthly newsletter and other updates, please register online by following this link <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs7.htm>. If you do not wish to receive this monthly newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email/fax list, please email us at acshnk@yahoo.com or follow the instructions at the bottom of this newsletter to unsubscribe.

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Closures Due to Typhoons

The U.S. Consulate General, including the ACS Unit, will close whenever the Hong Kong authorities announce that a Typhoon 8 signal will soon be hoisted. We may resume services if the Typhoon 8 signal is lowered before 1:00PM. If the signal is lowered after 1:00PM, the Consulate will reopen the following workday. For emergency services when the Consulate is closed, please call 2523-9011.

How to Avoid Delays in Receiving Passport Services

First and foremost, please come early to the ACS Unit. We open at 8:30AM and close at noon Monday through Friday, reopening at 1:30PM until 4:00PM except Wednesday afternoons plus local and U.S. holidays when we are closed. Customers who come closer to our opening hours, when we tend to have fewer customers, will receive faster service. Customers who come closer to our closing hours may need to wait longer as we assist customers who arrived earlier.

Second, to provide equitable services to all customers we use a ticketing machine to call customers to the window in order of when they took the ticket. The ticketing machine is located at the entrance to the ACS waiting room. Please take a ticket when you enter and again if you have been given a form for completion such as adding pages or applying for a new passport (most forms are available on line at our web site, <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov>, and we encourage customers to complete the relevant forms prior to requesting consular services).

Third, we have recently received applications for visa pages additions, passport renewals, emergency passports and other passport services that have been incomplete and thus delayed. We strongly advise U.S. citizens to plan travel in advance including any requirements or updates related to their travel documents. The most common reasons for delay:

- **Damaged Passports**: We cannot provide passport services such as adding visa pages to passports that are damaged. Traveling with a secure passport protects your personal security and protects U.S. national security. In addition, travelers using damaged passports may be detained, denied admission and/or otherwise inconvenienced when traveling abroad. Security features of a U.S. passport may be impacted by damage to the biographic/photograph page, deterioration to passport stitching due to multiple visa pages inserts etc. When a passport is damaged, a new passport application must be made. For more information, please see: <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/damagedpassports.htm>.
- **Incorrect Photos**: We are often presented with photos that are too small, too dark, have an improper background, have a border or otherwise do not comply with current passport photo standards. For more details on current passport photo requirements, please see: http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/composition_checklist.html.
- **Special Requirements For Minor Children**: Passport services for minor children under 14 years old have special requirements enacted by the United States Congress due to concerns regarding international child abduction. Requirements often missing at the time of application are the child's presence, the child's birth certificate, a birth certificate that contains incorrect or incomplete information, the current passport of the parents/legal guardians, consent letter from the non-applying parent, or court order that grants sole custody to the applying parent or court order specifically authorizing passport issuance to the minor regardless of custody. For current requirements, please see: <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/passports.htm>.

In summary, please keep your travel documents current and in good condition. Based on reasons including but limited to the above, we may not be able to provide services despite our wish to facilitate the travel of U.S. citizens. The information above describes the most common reasons for delay. For more information on passport processing and requirements, please see <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/passports.htm>.

Coming Soon – Passports and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad by Hongkong Post

Starting August 23, 2004, Hongkong Post began providing return of both non-immigrant and immigrant visas to successful applicants. We are coordinating with Hongkong Post to offer this same service to U.S. citizens who wish to have their non-emergency passports or Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (CRBA) returned by Hongkong Post and who are registered with the Consulate. Such registration allows us to contact the U.S. citizen concerning any delivery problems as well provide useful information and locate the U.S. citizen in case of emergency. Additional information on this delivery option will be provided on our Web site once we have finalized the internal arrangements.

As before, U.S. citizens seeking to renew their passports issued within the last 12 years and after the U.S. citizens turned 16 (“adult renewal passport”) and adding visa pages to undamaged passports (please see below) need not apply in person and may instead send their passports via the messenger of their choosing. We continue the practice of allowing any person with the receipt and the applicant’s valid passport (if any) to collect the new passport and/or CRBA by presenting the receipt, the messenger’s identification, and the applicant’s valid passport (if any) at the ACS Unit office during our public hours of 8:30AM to Noon, 1:30PM to 4:00PM, Monday through Friday, except Wednesday afternoons plus U.S. and local holidays when we are closed to the public.

The Hong Kong delivery fee (for up to 500 grams) is \$25HKD. The Macau delivery fee (for up to 500 grams) is \$65HKD. This service is offered as a convenience. Passport and CRBA fees collected with the application(s) cover the cost of processing the application(s) only.

U.S. citizens are eligible to receive their U.S. passport or CRBA by courier return if:

- The U.S. citizen is applying for a regular passport, visa pages, passport amendment or a CRBA;
- The U.S. citizen is present in Hong Kong or Macau at the time of application and when the requested items are delivered;
- The delivery address is in Hong Kong or Macau;
- The applicant’s currently valid U.S. passport is cancelled during the application; and
- The U.S. citizen is currently registered with the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong. If the U.S. citizen is not registered, s/he may do so online at <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.htm>.

Courier return is **not** available for reasons including but not limited to:

- During the processing of a new U.S. passport, the applicant opts to retain a still valid U.S. passport. New passports can only be delivered after the prior passport is cancelled at the Consulate General.
- Emergency passports cannot be returned via courier; these are normally issued while the applicant waits.

Other important items

- When the passport application has been processed and the passport is ready for collection (usually ten calendar days), we will provide the passport(s) to Hongkong Post

for qualified applicants who chose courier return. The current delivery estimates are two days for Hong Kong delivery and three days for Macau delivery.

The passport and/or CRBA will only be handled at the Hongkong Post counter at the U.S. Consulate General or in Hongkong Post premises to ensure security of the items. In the event an item is lost or stolen, Hongkong Post may offer a maximum compensation of \$2,500HKD.

The recipient must sign a delivery receipt. If no one is available, a notification card will be left for the addressee to inform him/her to call Hongkong Post to arrange another delivery attempt or collection at one of the 130 Post Offices. If no response is received from the addressee within 1-2 days and if the second delivery attempt is unsuccessful, the items will be returned to the U.S. Consulate General.

U.S. citizens who chose courier return and do not receive their documents within 30 days should contact Hongkong Post at 2921-2211. Passports not collected from the U.S. Consulate General within one year after the application date will be cancelled and returned to the Department of State without refund to the applicant.

Certain passport applicants may apply using the "Passport by mail" form. This form was designed for use in the U.S. but is used by overseas Embassies and Consulates to process applications. The fee paid with the "Passport by mail" form does not include mail or courier delivery for overseas applicants.

Current Travel Information

On August 1, 2004, 1400 EDT, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security raised the homeland security threat level to ORANGE (HIGH) for the financial services sectors in New York City, Northern New Jersey and Washington, D.C. The threat level for the rest of the nation remains at YELLOW (ELEVATED). Further information about the announcement may be obtained at the DHS Internet website at www.dhs.gov or www.ready.gov.

The Department of State continues to monitor security conditions overseas and, as always, will promptly disseminate information affecting the safety of Americans abroad through its consular information program. These documents are available on the Department's Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Since our last newsletter (July 30, 2004), the Department of State has issued Travel Warnings or Public Announcements about travel to the following countries or areas:

The Bahamas, 8/31, Travel Warning
Turks and Caicos, 8/31, Travel Warning
Uzbekistan, 8/24, Public Announcement
Bangladesh, 8/24, Public Announcement
Middle East and North Africa, 8/21, Public Announcement
Congo-Kinshasa, 8/19, Travel Warning
Saudi Arabia, 8/12, Travel Warning
Venezuela, 8/11, Public Announcement
Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, 8/3, Travel Warning
Liberia, 7/30, Travel Warning
Chad, 7/30, Public Announcement.

The Department of State also issued a World Wide Caution on April 29, 2004 that expires on October 23, 2004.

In addition to these travel warnings and public announcements, the State Department issues [Consular Information Sheets](#) for every country of the world with information on such matters as the health conditions, crime, unusual currency or entry requirements, any areas of instability, and the location of the nearest embassy or consulate in the subject country.

The full texts of these and other current documents are available at the Department of State, Consular Affairs, Web site <http://travel.state.gov>.

Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS)

The State Department recently launched a new and much improved consular website, <http://travel.state.gov>. The Web site's appearance, usability and functionality have all been enhanced, and it has improved organization and navigational tools to help users find information more quickly and accurately.

An important new function is secure online travel registration, which will allow U.S. citizens (USCs) to record foreign trip and residence information that the Department of State can use to communicate with USCs and assist USCs in case of an emergency.

USCs around the world who travel or reside abroad can access this site either through a link on travel.state.gov, or directly, at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>. The Department of State invites USCs to register themselves and their families and get acquainted with travel registration. If USCs are already registered with this consulate, the Department asks that they please re-register on line to update their records.

The new Internet travel registration service for USCs allows USCs to register and update their contact information on the Internet at any time, making it easier for USCs to keep their information current. The site also provides USCs with up-to-date travel information customized to the USC's unique travel agenda and itinerary. The data USCs provide is secured behind Department of State firewalls, accessed only by cleared personnel in Embassies, Consulates, and the Department of State, and releasable only with the USC's permission under the provisions of the Privacy Act.

Please let the Department know how you like the new site. If you encounter any difficulties or have any questions about this travel registration website, please send an e-mail to caibr@state.gov. If USCs have specific questions about their registration with this consulate please contact us by email: acshnk@yahoo.com.

Minors Must Appear in Person for Passport Services

Effective March 26, 2004, The Department of State ended the passport Mail-In Renewal Application for minors. Therefore, eligibility for the mail-in program will be limited to those individuals that are able to submit a full-validity passport issued when the applicant was over the age of 16. The new regulations require that all minors personally appear at the Consulate for passport services, including new passports and adding visa pages.

Minor applicants will also now be required to pay the normal US\$ 30 passport execution fee regardless whether they are registered with the US Consulate.

The change is being implemented to enhance accurate identification of applicants and to aid in the prevention of international child abduction and trafficking.

For more detailed information on passport application procedures, please visit our web site at <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov>.

U.S. Birth Certificates for People's Republic of China (PRC) Visas

The ACS Unit has received of late several requests for birth certificates for U.S. born children applying here for PRC visas. Regrettably, this office cannot provide those

documents or any equivalent such as a certification of parent-child relationship. Rather, the visa applicants should request those documents from the state where the birth occurred. For those addresses and more information on related state requirements, please consult the following Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm>. For additional information on PRC visa requirements, please directly contact the Chinese Visa Office, 7/F, Lower Block, China Resources Building, 26 Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong, tel. 3413-2424.

Internal Revenue Service Forms and Contact Information

The ACS Unit has a limited quantity of IRS tax forms available to the public on a first-come, first-served basis during our public hours of 8:30AM to Noon, 1:30PM to 4:30PM, Monday through Friday, except Wednesday afternoons and local and U.S. holidays. These forms may also be downloaded from the IRS Web site, www.irs.gov. The Internal Revenue Service at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo closed on June 18, 2004. For information on how to contact the IRS, please consult our Web site, specifically <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/taxassistancetips.htm>.

Information from the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)

With the November 2004 General Election almost upon us, and registration deadlines even sooner, time is running out for U.S. citizens who want to participate in the elections this year. **The FVAP estimates that the week of September 3 - 11, 2004 is the last really safe week to submit a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), SF-76, request for registration and/or an absentee ballot which meets most state deadlines** (always refer to the 2004-2005 Voting Assistance Guide for state registration and ballot deadlines).

Issue Highlights:

- The FWAB
- Absentee Voting Week
- How to Use the FWAB
- Suggestions for Submitting FWAB
- FWAB vs. State Write-In Ballot
- NASS, States Engage Military & Overseas
- Why FWAB May Not Count

If your regular state absentee ballot does not arrive in time, use the The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot

What exactly is the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB)? What purpose does it serve and where is it available? When can it be used and who can use it? Read on for these answers and more...

The most common barrier that citizens covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) encounter when voting absentee is insufficient ballot transit time. Many citizens are located in remote areas around the world where mail is not delivered or picked up on a regular basis (such as sailors and marines aboard ship, and Peace Corps workers, missionaries, airmen, sailors and soldiers at remote sites).

The FWAB is pre-positioned overseas as a "back-up" ballot should a citizen not receive his or her regular ballot from the state or territory in enough time to meet state deadlines for counting (see Suggestions article below).

Under Federal provisions, a U.S. citizen may use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot to vote for Federal offices in the General Election if that citizen meets all three of the following conditions:

1. The citizen must be located outside the United States including APO and FPO addresses, and;
2. The citizen must make a timely ballot request, and submit the FPCA or other state accepted form to their state of legal voting residence requesting a state absentee ballot so that the appropriate Local Election Official receives their request at least 30 days before the election. (This year the FPCA must be received on or before October 4th for the 2004 General Election), and
3. The citizen has not received the regular state absentee ballot.

In summary, the FWAB is an emergency ballot, only valid when a U.S. citizen makes a timely ballot request for the General Election, is located outside the United States (including APO and FPO addresses) and the requested absentee ballot has not been received (see "How To Use The FWAB" below).

Absentee Voting Week - October 11 to 15, 2004

FVAP has designated October 11 to October 15, 2004 as Absentee Voting Week. During this time voters should return their voted ballot immediately upon receiving it. If overseas voters have not received their regular state ballot before Absentee Voting Week, then they should use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). For guidance on completing the FWAB and requirements for using the FWAB, read the articles in this issue. Page 12 of the 2004-05 Voting Assistance Guide contains additional information (available at www.fvap.gov).

Help dispel the myth that overseas absentee votes do not count! All properly executed ballots are counted.

How To Use The FWAB

If eligible to use this ballot, the citizen may indicate their election choices for Federal offices in the General Election. To vote this blank write-in ballot, citizens may vote for a candidate by writing in the candidate's name or writing in the name of a party affiliation (if the intention of a voter can be ascertained then, the candidate/party choices will be accepted). The FWAB is similar to the regular state absentee ballot as it includes a security envelope and a mailing envelope.

NOTE: For personal security, you may choose not to fill-in items 1.c, 1.d, and 1.e on the back of the FWAB transmittal envelope. However, if the state requires these items, you may write this information on a separate sheet of paper and place it inside the transmittal envelope (not the security envelope).

Place only the ballot inside the security envelope and do not write on it!

FWABs are available worldwide at U.S. embassies and consulates, military installations and overseas organizations and corporations with U.S. citizens.

Currently, the FWAB is prescribed by Federal law for use in general elections for Federal offices only. During the 2004 primaries, on an ad hoc basis, some states and jurisdictions

expanded its use for Primary Elections. Eleven states have legislatively expanded its use beyond the Federal law to include use in elections other than General Elections and/or voting for offices other than Federal offices - Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Virginia allows the FWAB to be used from within the U.S.

Use the FWAB from overseas when the election is rapidly approaching and insufficient time exists for you to receive, vote and timely return your requested state ballot.

A sample FWAB with instructions can be found in Chapter 2 of the Guide. Chapter 3 provides state-specific instructions regarding proper use of the FWAB.

SUGGESTIONS For Submitting The FWAB

The FVAP recommends that overseas citizens who have not received their regular state absentee ballot by the 25th day before the election (October 8, 2004), complete and submit the FWAB to their state local election official if they have met each of the requirements (see above). This will help to ensure timely receipt of their absentee ballot for Federal offices. The FWAB must be received by the local election official not later than the deadline for receipt of regular state absentee ballots for that election under state or territory law.

Citizens who receive their regular state absentee ballot after submitting the FWAB should vote and return the ballot immediately. Reason: If a citizen's regular state absentee ballot also arrives by the deadline for receipt of absentee ballots, generally, the state will count the regular state absentee ballot instead of the FWAB, as it will include non-Federal offices.

Citizens should carefully review the FWAB before submission to ensure that the absentee ballot complies with state's guidelines, instructions and requirements. Citizens should make sure that they are submitting the FWAB to the correct jurisdiction. Refer to Chapter 3, Section III (Where to Send It) of the 2004-05 Voting Assistance Guide. Sign and date the ballot return envelope and obtain a notary/witness signature if the state requires it.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!

The Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot and The State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot

Several states provide a State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot for citizens who are unable to use regular state absentee voting procedures (submariners, citizens in isolated areas). This State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot should not be confused with the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. Federal law prescribes eligibility requirements for FWAB use. State laws prescribe requirements for State Special ballot use.

As of the date of this publication, the following states provide a special write-in ballot: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut*, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

State-specific instructions regarding proper use of State Special ballots are provided in Chapter 3 of the 2004-05 Voting Assistance Guide.

*Note: The State of Connecticut is not required by Federal law to accept the FWAB, though in 1996 it began accepting it in regular elections for Federal offices. In addition, a Special

State Write-In Ballot is available 90 days before an election to members of the Armed Forces and dependents accompanying them, who, due to military contingencies, are unable to use regular absentee voting procedures.

NASS, States Engage Military and Overseas Voters

The National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) has added a military and overseas voters' page to its website as part of its continued efforts to engage the more than one million U.S. troops on active duty and other U.S. civilians overseas. NASS member states and territories will include similar information on their websites.

NASS is also working with the Defense Department and U.S. Postal Service to implement a plan, which the association helped develop, for expedited ballot transport.

Go to www.nass.org. Select Military and Overseas Voters.

Reasons Why the FWAB May Not Be Counted

The FWAB may not be counted if it is submitted from any location within the United States (except Virginia voters).

The FWAB may not be counted if the citizen did not make a timely request for a state absentee ballot (request must be received by your local election office on or before October 4, 2004 for the General Election).

The FWAB may not be counted if it is not received by the local election official by the state deadline for counting.

The FWAB will not be counted if the transmittal envelope is not signed and dated, and the required witness or notary signatures are not included (see state instructions of the Guide).

The FWAB will not be counted if the state also receives a properly cast regular state absentee ballot from the voter by the state deadline for counting.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT TO SUBMIT YOUR FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) Standard Form 76 SO THE LOCAL ELECTIONS OFFICE RECEIVES IT by October 4, 2004!

Why? In many states the deadline for receipt of registration and/or absentee ballot requests is 30 days before the November 2 General Election. There are no states with earlier deadlines. Check the Voting Assistance Guide for specific state deadlines. Don't miss your state's registration deadline.

Voting Information Web Sites

The FVAP Register and Vote 2004 Campaign has a website at www.registerandvote2004.org designed for US citizens, ages 18 through 24, to provide information on the democratic process and links to candidate information.

The New Millennium Young Voters Project website at <http://www.stateofthevote.org/>, hosted by the National Association of Secretaries of State, is another source for obtaining non-partisan information on candidates.

List of Primaries for 2004 Election

For your reference, we are printing below a list of upcoming Presidential and state primaries by month. This list comes from the Federal Voting Assistance Program web site, www.fvap.gov. Please check when your state will hold its primary and, if you will not be there, consider voting absentee.

If you missed your state's primary, you may wish to complete and submit an absent ballot request now for the general election on November 2, 2004. Federal Post Card Applications for voter registration and absentee ballots are available at www.fvap.gov or during regular office hours at the ACS Unit of the U.S. Consulate.

(P) Stands for Presidential Primary

(S) Stands for State Party Primary

SEPTEMBER- Guam 09/04 (S), Arizona 09/07 (S), Nevada 09/07 (P,S), New York 09/09 (S), Delaware 09/11 (S), Virgin Islands 09/11 (S), District of Columbia 09/14 (S), Massachusetts 09/14 (S), Minnesota 09/14 (S), New Hampshire 09/14 (S), Rhode Island 09/14 (S), Vermont 09/14 (S), Washington 09/14 (S), Wisconsin 09/14 (S), Hawaii 09/18 (S), Louisiana 09/18 (S)

Holidays and Other Closures

Please note that the Consulate will be closed on the following official holidays for the remainder of 2004.

Monday, September 6	Labor Day	A
Wednesday, September 29	The day following Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival	L
Friday, October 1	National Day	L
Monday, October 11	Columbus Day	A
Friday, October 22	Chung Yeung Festival	L
Thursday, November 11	Veterans Day	A
Thursday, November 25	Thanksgiving Day	A
Saturday, December 25 (observed Friday, December 24)	Christmas Day	A/L
Monday, December 27	First Week-Day after Christmas Day	L

A - American Holiday/L - Local Holiday

Other useful Internet addresses available for U.S. Citizens:

U.S. Federal Government: <http://www.firstgov.gov>; U.S. Department of State Consular Affairs: <http://travel.state.gov>; U.S. Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov>; U.S. Federal Aviation Administration: <http://www.faa.gov>;

U.S. Internal Revenue Service: <http://www.irs.gov>; Social Security Administration: <http://www.ssa.gov>; SSA Newsletter: www.ssa.gov/enews/; Federal Voting Assistance: <http://www.fvap.gov>; U.S. Customs & Border Protection: <http://www.cbp.gov> (for information including importation of household pets, animal and plant health inspection, etc); U.S. Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov> (for information on food products, food safety and inspection service); Hong Kong Immigration Department: <http://www.info.gov.hk/immd>.

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If you would prefer not to receive further messages from this office, please email us at acshnk@yahoo.com or follow these instructions:

1. Click on the Reply button.
2. Replace the Subject field with the word REMOVE.
3. Click the Send button.

You will receive one additional e-mail message confirming your removal.