

RETENTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF OFFICIAL AND DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS

1. PURPOSE

This Directive communicates the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) policy and guidelines regarding the management of all official and diplomatic passports issued to APHIS employees. All official and diplomatic passports are the property of the U.S. Government.

2. BACKGROUND

The USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), International Travel Section, is the official point of contact (POC) to the State Department for all USDA travel-related matters. FAS has historically retained APHIS' official and diplomatic passports and managed the process for travel visas from foreign embassies. APHIS, International Services, International Travel Section (APHIS-IS-ITS) in Riverdale, MD now retains the management of APHIS official and diplomatic passports. APHIS will continue to process the foreign visas through FAS; and FAS will continue to be the official POC to the State Department for all USDA travelers.

3. AUTHORITY/REFERENCE

[Title 22 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) Foreign Relations.](#)

4. SCOPE

This Directive applies to all APHIS employees.

5. POLICY

USDA employees traveling to foreign countries to conduct official business on behalf of APHIS will travel using either "Official" or "Diplomatic" passports. The State Department Passport office has advised USDA that Title 22 CFR Foreign Relations requires the use of "Official" or "Diplomatic" passports for travel to foreign countries to conduct official U.S. Government business. The only exceptions are as follows:

- a. Exception to the Required Use Policy. U.S. Government employees traveling to Taiwan in any official capacity must use personal passports. Employees can request that the Government provide “Personal” passports at the Government's expense for official travel to Taiwan. If a personal passport is issued at the Government’s expense for official travel, the passport is the property of the U.S. Government and will be kept in the safe, in Riverdale, MD or the hub, when not in use.
- b. Prohibited Use. U.S. Government employees traveling abroad on personal travel must not use “Official” or “Diplomatic” passports in any capacity. In addition, U.S. Government employees detailed to a private or international organization will not use “Official” or “Diplomatic” passports. The fact that the Government continues to pay employees’ salaries does not constitute a reason to use “Official” or “Diplomatic” passports.
- c. Provisional Use. U.S. Government employees assigned overseas in an official capacity, as approved by the State Department, may use their “Official” or “Diplomatic” passports for personal travel during their tour of duty. U.S. Government employees traveling abroad on official business may use the “Official” or “Diplomatic” passports for Agency-approved personal stops incidental to the official trip.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. Employees.
 - (1) Employees will request new passports and renew existing passports by accessing the passport application forms on the [U.S. Department of State’s Web site](#) and contact APHIS-IS-ITS for additional details and specific instructions. Employees are required to contact APHIS-IS-ITS before submitting paperwork to allow the staff to assist in the application process. Employees must follow the instructions exactly or requests can be delayed. When obtaining or renewing an official passport, APHIS-IS-ITS will maintain the passport in the safe file in Riverdale, MD, when received from FAS, until the employee is scheduled for official travel. All documents used in obtaining the official passport will be returned to the employee.
 - (2) Employees will report lost or stolen Government passports to APHIS-IS-ITS immediately.

- (3) Employees will complete passport renewal paperwork, upon notification from APHIS-IS-ITS, at least 6 months before the expiration date. Many countries refuse to issue visas to travelers with passports that expire within 6 months of planned travel.
- (4) Employees will return passports to APHIS-IS-ITS if they are located in the Washington, DC/Riverdale, MD area; or the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS) Hub Travel Coordinator within 5 working days after returning from official travel. The only exceptions are below:
- (a) APHIS employees assigned to one of the following hubs will return their passports to the MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinator: Raleigh, NC; Minneapolis, MN; and Fort Collins, CO.
 - (b) APHIS employees assigned to Ames, IA will return their passports to the APHIS designated Travel Coordinator.
 - (c) APHIS employees at U.S. border locations, who frequently travel to Mexico or Canada; employees in remote locations; and employees whose official duty station is their home will retain possession of their official passports and follow the guidelines below:
 - 1 These employees will be identified by their Program Deputy Administrators office on an annual basis. A Program consolidated list will be sent to APHIS-IS-ITS annually.
 - 2 APHIS-IS-ITS will maintain copies of the photo pages of the official Government passports of these identified employees in the IS encrypted database.
 - 3 These employees will sign annual certifications of responsibility for the safety and maintenance of their Government official passports.
 - 4 These employees are responsible to notify APHIS-IS-ITS within 24 hours of lost or stolen Government-issued official passports.

- (d) APHIS employees who are frequent travelers (4-5 times per year); and are not located near a hub.
- 1 These employees will be identified by their Program Deputy Administrators' office on an annual basis. A Program consolidated list will be sent to APHIS-IS-ITS annually.
 - 2 APHIS-IS-ITS will maintain copies of the photo pages of the official Government passports of these identified employees in the IS encrypted database.
 - 3 These employees will sign annual certifications of responsibility for the safety and maintenance of their Government official passports. The annual certifications will be kept in the secure safe at APHIS-IS-ITS in Riverdale, MD.
 - 4 These employees are responsible to notify APHIS-IS-ITS within 24 hours of lost or stolen Government issued official passports.
- (5) Employees will submit notification of foreign travel to APHIS-IS-ITS (with cc to their MRPBS Travel Coordinator) 45 days in advance of planned travel via email. The APHIS-IS Notification of Foreign Travel Form can be found on the APHIS Portal. Submit the form via email to: **foreign.travel@aphis.usda.gov**. Upon notification of the pending travel, APHIS-IS-ITS will issue visa forms to the traveler; and either APHIS-IS-ITS (if traveler is in Washington, DC/Riverdale, MD) or the MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinator will prepare the passport for travel. Country clearances are mandatory. Employees must submit country clearance requests via email to: foreign.travel@aphis.usda.gov at least 10 working days before the travel is scheduled to occur. Country clearance request forms can be obtained from APHIS-IS-ITS by emailing: **foreign.travel@aphis.usda.gov**
- (6) Employees, working in Washington, DC, who request their passports for travel to countries that do not require visas, should allow at least 2 business days for processing. APHIS-IS-ITS will send passports by overnight mail, using carriers such as FedEx or UPS. APHIS-IS-ITS will coordinate the visa process with FAS. The visa processing at foreign

embassies can vary from a few days to a few weeks. Therefore, employees should plan their travel to include sufficient time for visa processing. APHIS-IS-ITS recommends that employees coordinate with their IS travel specialists for country-specific visa requirements, which are subject to change without notice. All visa requests for APHIS employees are required to be processed through the APHIS-IS-ITS office. **Programs and employees are not authorized to go directly to FAS or the embassies for visa processing.**

- (7) Employees will return expired, damaged, or unserviceable passports to APHIS-IS-ITS or their MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinator. Employees are not authorized to dispose of U.S. Government passports.
- (8) Employees will turn in U.S. Government passports upon retirement or separation from APHIS as part of their employee out-processing. **Employees MUST turn in U.S. Government passports prior to their last working day.**

b. MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators.

- (1) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that the APHIS employees within their hub, turn in their passports within 5 days upon return from travel. Upon receipt of official passports, the MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinator will notify APHIS-IS-ITS so the passport database can be updated.
- (2) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators are responsible for the safekeeping of the Government passports assigned to them.
- (3) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators will store the Government passports in a fireproof locked safe.
- (4) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators will inventory passports assigned to them annually and report status to APHIS-IS-ITS. APHIS-IS-ITS is responsible to inventory Government passports, as required.
- (5) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators will retrieve Government passports from APHIS employees who retire, resign, or transfer before the employees are allowed to complete out-processing. Government passports will be immediately forwarded to APHIS-IS-ITS, Riverdale, MD.

- (6) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators will retrieve the passports under their responsibility within 5 working days of their travelers' return. If the traveler does not return the passport within 5 working days, the MRPBS Hub Traveler Coordinator will notify APHIS-IS-ITS, via email, immediately. APHIS-IS-ITS will then notify the Associate Deputy Administrator, International Business Services who will notify the Program Associate Deputy Administrator to assist in passport retrieval.
- (7) MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators will return expired, damaged, or unserviceable passports to APHIS-IS-ITS for proper disposal by the State Department.

c. APHIS-IS-ITS will:

- (1) Work with MRPBS Headquarters to designate MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators (as requested by the Office of the Administrator) who will be responsible to receive, distribute, maintain, and inventory official Government passports.
- (2) Be responsible to receive, distribute, maintain, inventory, and process official and diplomatic passports in the Riverdale, MD/Washington, DC area.
- (3) Process Riverdale, MD/Washington, DC employee requests to acquire official Government passports for travel to countries that do not require entry visas within 2 business days. Passport pick-up and drop-off hours are 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday, in 6.D.09.7, 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD, 20737.
- (4) Notify employees and MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators, via email, when passports will expire, within 6 months of the expiration date, to begin the renewal process.
- (5) Process all visa requests for APHIS employees through FAS. APHIS employees and MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators are not authorized to go directly to FAS or the embassies for visa processing. Requests for visas should be sent to APHIS-IS-ITS at least 30-45 days before the expected travel date.
- (6) Process all new official/diplomatic passports; changes in passports; and expirations.

- (7) Track, monitor, and inventory all APHIS official and diplomatic passports worldwide.

7. RETIREMENTS AND SEPARATIONS

APHIS is accountable to the State Department and FAS for all official and diplomatic U.S. Government passports issued to APHIS employees. APHIS-IS-ITS will conduct an annual audit of all Government passports. Employees who separate or retire from APHIS must relinquish their Government passports to APHIS-IS-ITS or their MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators during their out-processing.* MRPBS Hub Travel Coordinators are required to send passports to APHIS-IS-ITS. These passports will be forwarded to the State Department for destruction or cancellation. **Employees must turn in their U.S. Government official or diplomatic passports prior to their last working day with APHIS.** Employees are not authorized to leave the Agency with their Government passports; they are the property of the U.S. Government.

*Employees who retain their passports should mail their official/diplomatic passports to the address in Section 11.a. below.

8. REQUIREMENTS

To request new official or diplomatic passports, or when renewing official or diplomatic passports, APHIS employees must present their SF-50, Notice of Personnel Action, showing proof of their employment. This SF-50 can be obtained and printed from employees' APHIS Employee Personal Page.

9. EXEMPTIONS

APHIS term employees with less than 6 months of employment remaining on their term cannot obtain official or diplomatic passports if their SF-50 reflects this limitation.

10. EXCEPTIONS

Except as noted in Section 6.a.4 above, each APHIS Program must meet the requirements of this Directive.

11. INQUIRIES

- a. Direct inquiries to:

APHIS International Travel Section
4700 River Road, Unit 65
Riverdale, MD 20737
301-851-3784
Foreign.Travel@aphis.usda.gov

b. This Directive can be accessed on the [APHIS](#) Administrative Issuances homepage.

/s/

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