

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES
American Citizens Services Newsletter

U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
February/March 2010

This periodic email newsletter is a service to U.S. citizens who live in or are travelling through the consular district of the U.S. Consulate General Melbourne, which comprises the States of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Through this American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consular Section highlights information pertaining to consular procedures, policies, and other topics of general interest to U.S. citizens who have registered with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and provided an email address. If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to our periodic newsletter and receive other updates, please register online by following this link: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>.

If you do not wish to receive this periodic newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email list, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[PROPOSED CHANGES IN CONSULAR FEES INCLUDING FOR U.S. PASSPORTS](#)

[CONSULAR OUTREACH IN HOBART SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 16](#)

[NEW LAW MAKES ABSENTEE VOTING EASIER FOR OVERSEAS AMERICANS](#)

[BUSHFIRE SEASON PREPAREDNESS](#)

[AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES, MELBOURNE – PUBLIC HOURS](#)

[FILING IMMIGRANT VISA PETITIONS FOR YOUR SPOUSE OR CHILD](#)

[INTERNET CORRESPONDENT IN TROUBLE? SPOTTING POTENTIAL SCAMS](#)

[INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE FORMS AND TAX INFORMATION ON LINE](#)

[BRING YOUR OWN PHOTOCOPIES OR PAY THE FEES](#)

[CONSULAR OUTREACH – COMING TO A CAPITAL NEAR YOU!!](#)

[AVIAN INFLUENZA – BE PREPARED!](#)

[ON-LINE APPOINTMENT SYSTEM FOR AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES](#)

[AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS](#)

TRAVEL INFORMATION

USEFUL WEB SITES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS AND CONSULATE CLOSURES

Proposed Changes in Consular Fees including for U.S. Passports

On February 9, 2010 the Department of State published a proposed rule in the Federal Register to change certain consular fees, including those related to U.S. passport and passport card applications, immigrant visas, and other services provided to U.S. and foreign citizens.

The proposed rule to change fees is based on a comprehensive cost of service study completed in June 2009. As demand for passports increased to an average of 15 million per year, the increase in certain fees will help cover actual operating expenses for the Department of State's 301 consular posts abroad, 23 domestic passport agencies, and other centers that provide consular services to both U.S and foreign citizens. However, improvements in automated systems have also decreased some fees, such as the application fee for determining returning resident status.

Consular services include assistance to American citizens who are victims of crime abroad or citizens who require evacuation during natural disasters overseas, such as those in the recent earthquake in Haiti. The cost of providing such services in fiscal year 2009 was almost 300 million dollars.

This proposed rule to change fees is distinct from the [proposed rule to increase non-immigrant visa application fees published on December 14, 2009](#). The comment period on that proposed rule ended February 12, 2010.

The Department will not begin collecting either of these new proposed fees until it fully considers public comments and publishes a final rule. In order to view both proposed rules and to submit comments, please go to www.regulations.gov.

Consular Outreach in Hobart Scheduled for March 16

We are pleased to advise you that the U.S. Consul is scheduled to be in Hobart on March 16 for consular outreach including certain American Citizen Services. We will be accepting applications for U.S. passports and/or Consular Reports of Birth Abroad for applicants who are legally required to have an interview with a consular officer. Applications which can be submitted by mail will not be accepted. No visa or notarial services will be available.

If you would like to submit an application for a U.S. passport and/or Consular Report of Birth Abroad during the consular visit, please send an email to MelbourneACS@state.gov. Your email should include the names and date of birth of each applicant, as well as your address, telephone number, and a brief description of service(s) you are requesting.

Once we have received your information we will keep you informed of what you are required to do in preparation for the visit. We will also inform you of the appointment location and time.

Please take advantage of this opportunity as we may not visit Hobart again this fiscal year.

New Law Makes Absentee Voting Easier for Overseas U.S. Citizens

On October 28, 2009, Congress enacted the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. This legislation amends existing law regarding overseas voting in Federal elections, and should make voting easier for overseas Americans.

New Procedures for 2010 Elections

Beginning with the November 2010 general election, and for all subsequent general, special, and primary elections, states will be required to mail out ballots at least 45 days prior to an election for a Federal office. This requirement may cause some states to select earlier primary dates in order to comply with the 45 day mailing deadline, or to request waivers due to special circumstances.

In addition to mailing ballots to overseas voters, the states will be required, at the voter's request, to provide registration forms, absentee ballot request forms, and blank ballots via fax or email. However, each state's laws determine whether ballot requests or voted ballots can be returned via fax or email. The new law prohibits states from rejecting marked ballots based on notarization, paper size, or paper weight requirements. The witnessing requirements of individual states remain in place.

Overseas Absentee Ballot Requests

Effective immediately, states will no longer be required by Federal law to continue to mail election materials to overseas addresses (even when they are determined to be invalid) for two complete general election cycles on the basis of a single ballot request. It will now be up to each state to determine how long to continue to send out election materials before requiring overseas voters to submit new ballot requests. This change, sought by local election officials, should greatly decrease the volume of voting materials sent abroad to addresses where Americans no longer reside.

State Department Recommendations

In light of these changes, the Department of State recommends that all U.S. voters residing outside the U.S. request absentee ballots from their local election officials at the start of each calendar year, and whenever there is a change of address, change of e-mail address, or change of name, by completing and sending in a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). To locate information on your specific state's requirements, and to obtain an on-line version of the FPCA, please visit www.fvap.org. Voters may also pick up a hard copy of the FPCA from any U.S. embassy or consulate. FPCAs may be mailed to your local voting officials in the United States via international mail or from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Many states allow U.S. citizens overseas to submit the FPCA by e-mail or fax.

The Department of State strongly encourages all U.S. overseas voters to provide email addresses or fax numbers on their FPCAs to enable local election officials to transmit

election materials in the fastest manner available, which should then allow sufficient time for the return of voted ballots. For information regarding your specific state, please visit www.fvap.org.

Emergency Ballots

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) serves as an emergency ballot for the November general elections for Federal offices, although some states also permit its use for elections for state and local offices. Beginning in January 2011, the new law allows use of the FWAB for primary, special, and runoff elections for Federal offices. Voters who request an absentee ballot

in advance of their state's ballot request deadline, but who fail to receive an official ballot from local election officials in time to vote, should complete the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and send it back to local election officials in time for it to be counted. An on-line version of the FWAB, together with instructions for its use, is available at www.fvap.gov.

Questions?

The Voting Assistance Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne, Australia, is also always available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, call 03-9526-5900 or send an e-mail to VoteMelbourne@state.gov.

[Bushfire Season Preparedness](#)

Drawing from Internet sites and other public sources, the Management Office of the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne previously provided to employees and their dependents guidance on bushfire preparedness. This information may also be useful to U.S. citizens and we therefore are reprinting it below.

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

a. Victorian Bushfire Information Line

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) in partnership with the Victorian Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) has established this bushfire information line to provide the community with a wide range of information about bushfires. The Victorian Bushfire Information Line Phone number is: **1800 240 667**.

b. At Home

All people who live in a high bushfire risk area need to develop a Bushfire Survival Plan. A Bushfire Survival Plan is a well thought out plan about how you will prepare and respond to a fire in your area. A plan should include a set of actions to address the risk and will require you to make a series of decisions about what you will do on a high fire risk day, or should a fire threaten your home. To develop your plan you need to consider all the issues about your level of risk, actions you will undertake to prepare yourself and your home for bushfire and what you will do on high fire risk days. Even if your decision is to leave the area before fire threatens, you still need a well thought out plan. Everyone's circumstances are different so it is important that you develop a plan that suits your household. Make sure all members of your household know what the plan is and know what roles and responsibilities they have. As circumstances change, it is important that you review your Bushfire Survival Plan before each summer fire season.

The Country Fire Authority website (www.cfa.vic.gov.au) provides useful information that will help you to develop a bushfire plan.

c. Travel in Victoria Outside Metropolitan Melbourne

With the continuing risk of bushfires throughout the State, if you must travel you should check the Country Fire Authority and VicRoads websites before your departure and tune your radio to ABC 774 AM while you are traveling to get updates on road and town closures. Please also take note of the bushfire survival strategies contained on these websites. The basics are:

If you are caught on the road, **don't get out and run:**

- Pull to the side, preferably in an area clear of tall trees and long grass.
- Put your hazard lights on and close the windows and vents.
- Cover any exposed areas of skin with a woolen blanket and get down as low as possible.
- Only when the fire has passed do you get out and move to safety.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Residents away from home should not try to return to the area as access may be limited and the roads may not be safe.

The websites are:

Country Fire Authority: www.cfa.vic.gov.au

VicRoads: <http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/NewsRoom/BushFiresRoadClosures/>

ABC radio: <http://www.abc.net.au/>

ABC bandwidth frequencies throughout Victoria:
<http://www.abc.net.au/reception/freq/vic.htm>

American Citizen Services, Melbourne – Public Hours

The American Citizens Services (ACS) section in Melbourne encourages all U.S. citizens seeking consular services who are eligible to apply by mail, such as for renewing passports issued to adults or adding visa pages to passports, to do so. For those services requiring a personal appearance, we have structured our public hours in coordination with the Non Immigrant Visa (NIV) Unit to better accommodate U.S. citizens seeking services after school hours and/or in the afternoons. Please note that these services are by appointment only; appointments must be made on line at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/appointments.html>. Exceptions to this rule include genuine emergencies, such as travel for a death in the family.

The current public hours for Melbourne ACS are as follows:

Counter Service hours (by appointment only)

- Monday: 9:00 am – 12:00 noon & 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm
- Tuesday: 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm
- Wednesday: 9:00 am – 12:00 noon & 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm
- Thursday: 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm

- Friday: 12:30 pm — 3:30 pm

Telephone Service hours

- Monday — Thursday: 9:00 am — 12:00

Please note that the Consulate General is closed on certain [U.S. and local holidays](#) and the first Wednesday of every month.

If you have any questions in relation to our new hours please direct them to MelbourneACS@state.gov.

Filing Immigrant Visa Petitions for Your Spouse or Child

The U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne periodically accepts appointments for U.S. citizens seeking to file petitions for their spouse or child to move permanently to the U.S. Those petitions are then sent to the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney for adjudication and further processing, including scheduling of appointments. Interested persons should email the Visa Unit at MelbourneNIV@state.gov to receive updates on when we are scheduling such appointments. For further information on U.S. immigrant visa procedures in Australia, please consult the Mission Australia Web site at <http://canberra.usembassy.gov/consular/visas/iv/file.html>.

Internet Correspondent In Trouble? Spotting Potential Scams

The U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne regularly receives emails and/or queries concerning Internet requests for assistance from persons whose bona fides are not clear. To assist U.S. citizens receiving similar correspondence, we provide the following information from the Department of State travel.state.gov Web site:

The Consular Affairs Bureau receives daily calls about international scams involving Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering. Many scams are initiated through the Internet; victims range in age from 18 to 81 and come from all socio-economic backgrounds.

If you feel you have been a victim of an Internet scam, please consult our consular publications for help and send all direct reports of Internet fraud to the Federal Bureau of Investigation at: <http://www.ic3.gov/> . If the scam originated through a particular website, notify the administrators of that website. If you are concerned about an American in distress overseas, but you are not sure if it is a legitimate case, call our office of Overseas Citizens Services at 888-407-4747 (from overseas: 202-501-4444).

- [Resources for Victims of International Financial Scams](#)
- [International Financial Scams Brochure](#) - for information on Internet Dating, Inheritance, Work Permits, Overpayment, and Money-Laundering
- [Russia Internet Dating Schemes](#) - for information on scams involving Internet dating from Russia
- [Spanish Lottery Scam](#)
- [Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas](#)

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms on line

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax forms for preparing annual tax returns are available online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>. Publication 4732, Federal Tax Information for U.S. Taxpayers Living Abroad, is also available in limited supplies at the U.S. Consulate General or on the Web at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4732.pdf>.

Please note that the Consular Section cannot provide U.S. taxpayer assistance, specifically in preparing tax returns. We also do not stock or provide tax forms given that those are now available on line. Rather, all queries should be directed to the IRS using the information at www.irs.gov. For more information on US taxation, you may wish to consult the Mission Australia Web site at <http://sydney.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/money/irs.html>.

Bring Your Own Photocopies or Pay the Cost

We wish to remind all of our American Citizen Services clients that as announced in our prior newsletters and posted on the Mission Australia Consular Services Web site, photocopies as well as the original supporting documents have to be submitted with all applications for passports, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, Social Security Numbers and federal benefits. We can photocopy the documents for you; however, this service incurs a fee of US\$1.00 per page.

Consular Outreach – Coming to a Capital Near You!!

The American Citizen Services Unit conducts periodic trips to Adelaide, Darwin, and Hobart to provide passport, registration, and other citizenship services that cannot be performed through the mail. We most recently conducted such visits to Adelaide in January. Subject to workload demand and funding, we tentatively plan visits to each capital in at least once in 2010. While we are committed to trying to provide this service on a regular basis, budgetary restrictions and other constraints may delay these visits. If you wish to register for notices of when a consular officer may be coming to one of these towns for consular outreach, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov. The visits are also advertised on our Web site, <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov>

“Swine” and/or Avian Influenza – Be Prepared!

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility that H1N1 “Swine” and/or H5N1 “Avian” Influenza may affect U.S. citizens overseas and provides extensive information on how U.S. citizens may prepare and protect themselves against the global disease. This includes a Swine/Avian Influenza Fact Sheet, http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html. Additional information may be available at www.travel.state.gov.

On-line Appointment Service for American Citizen Services

Effective November 5, 2007, all American Citizen Services that must be done in person require an appointment. The appointment system allows Americans requiring services to schedule their appointment times in advance, allowing for a greater flexibility of services and reduced waiting periods. Please book now for appointments over the next two months. Americans are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this new service by booking their appointment online from the relevant service page at Melbourne.usconsulate.state.gov. If

your service does not require a personal appearance, you will be instructed on how to apply through the mail. For further details, please consult our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

American Community Organizations

For the reference of U.S. citizens in or traveling through Australia, and without endorsing or recommending any specific club or organizations, the U.S. Mission in Australia maintains a list of clubs and/or organizations relevant to U.S. citizens. That list is available at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/americanorg.html>.

Travel Information

The Department of State publishes Country Specific Information Sheets, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings for places throughout the world. For the most current information published by the Department of State, including World Wide Caution announcements, please go directly to www.travel.state.gov. To receive this information automatically, please register through the Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS) at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

Useful Web Sites and Telephone Numbers

The following Web sites and telephone numbers are provided for the reference of U.S. citizens, without endorsing or recommending any organization. The U.S. Consulate General does not accept responsibility for the contents of these sites nor the information provided by these offices.

- * Domestic Violence (24 hours): 1-800-65-6463 (toll free)
- * Rape Counseling: <http://www.casa.org.au> in Melbourne, <http://www.yarrowplace.sa.gov.au/> in Adelaide, <http://www.sass.org.au/> in Tasmania, <http://www.rubygaea.org.au/> in Darwin.
- * For information on Australian visas: contact the Australian Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA) at www.immi.gov.au.
- * To obtain Australian birth/death/marriage certificates for all Australian states, visit www.bdm.nsw.gov.au.
- * For questions concerning U.S. customs rules and regulations, check out the U.S. Customs website at www.cbp.gov.
- * For information about taking your pet to the U.S., please consult the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website at www.aphis.usda.gov. You should also contact directly the airline/shipping company you plan to use in order to make arrangements and any required reservations in advance.
- * Social Security Administration: For the latest in social security information, go to www.ssa.gov for news and announcements.
- * Veterans Administration: Obtain up-to-date information about entitlements to VA benefits at www.va.gov. For VA Education Benefits, go to www.gibill.va.gov.
- * Internal Revenue Service: For tax forms and other timely information, go to www.irs.gov.

Upcoming Holidays and Consulate Closures

For a list of upcoming holidays and scheduled Consulate General closures, please consult our Web site at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/holidays.html>.

This newsletter is published by the American Citizens Services Unit, U.S. Consulate General, Melbourne, e-mail: MelbourneACS@state.gov; website: <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov>. Effective November 5, 2007, all non-emergency services requiring a personal appearance are by online appointment only at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/appointments.html>