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American Citizen Services Newsletter September 2007

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SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

While the security situation in Macedonia is currently stable, travelers always should be alert for unusual behavior and other possible indicators that something out of the ordinary might be happening. Americans should avoid demonstrations and other sites, such as roadblocks, where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Acts of intimidation and violence against American citizens have not occurred recently but remain possible. While overall levels of crime throughout Macedonia remain low, there have been occasional incidents of home and vehicle break-ins. We remind all American citizens to lock their windows and doors at all times and not to leave any valuables in plain sight in their vehicle.

Acts of violence in recent months in public venues, such as cafes and nightclubs, appear to be isolated incidents; however, all Americans are urged to remain alert and observant when in public. If you are inadvertently caught in this situation, take the following actions: remain calm, seek position of cover (under a table, etc.), avoid confrontation, leave if you can safely do so, try to stay with your group, and call the police.

The Worldwide Caution issued for American citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts remains in effect. For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's

website at <http://travel.state.gov>, where up-to-date [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Columbus Day – Monday, October 8
- People’s Uprising against Fascism – Thursday, October 11
- Ramazan Bajram – Friday, October 12
- Macedonian Revolutionary Struggle Day – Tuesday, October 23
- Veteran’s Day – Sunday, Observed Monday, November 12
- Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 22

CHANGING YOUR NAME ON YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

If you legally change your name because of marriage, divorce, court order or any other reason, it is important for you to update name change in Social Security’s records. Failure to do so can affect employment with an American company, filing of U.S. taxes, and even eligibility for future Social Security benefits.

To change your name on your Social Security card, you must show proof of your legal name change. Documents that Social Security may accept to prove a legal name change are:

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree
- Certificate of Naturalization showing a new name
- Court Order for a name change.

If the documents you provide for a legal name change do not give enough information to identify you (date of birth or age and previous name), then you must also show two identity documents:

- A document with your old name
- A second document with your new legal name.

In addition to your name, these documents must contain identifying information (date of birth or age) or a recent photograph.

You will need application form SS-5, downloadable from www.socialsecurity.gov, where you can also find useful information on other Social Security issues.

VOTING INFORMATION FOR THE 2008 U.S. ELECTIONS

All American citizens are reminded that 2008 is a presidential election year in the United States. Overseas citizens are eligible to participate in primary, run-off, and special elections that occur throughout the year, as well as the general elections in November. This election cycle, some presidential primary elections will take place as early as January 2008, and a significant number of primaries are set for February.

We strongly encourage you to register to vote and/or request absentee ballots as early as possible to ensure that you will receive all ballots for which you are eligible. Should questions or problems occur, you would still be able to address them in time to vote well in advance of the 2008 primaries.

The following is the basic absentee voting process:

1. You complete an application form (see below) and send it to local election officials in the U.S.;
2. The local official approves your request, or contacts you (ideally by e-mail) for further information;
3. The local official sends you an absentee ballot for all elections for which you are eligible to cast a ballot;
4. You vote the ballot and send it back in time to meet your state's deadline.

The official US Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov. It has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the downloadable absentee ballot application, state-specific instructions for completing the form, links to state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot for use by those who register in time but fail to receive an official ballot.

Overseas citizens groups help people to vote. We encourage you to contact Democrats Abroad, Republicans Abroad or other American citizens groups or organizations for assistance in registering to vote and requesting absentee ballots. Links to these groups are at <http://www.fvap.gov/links/ocitlinks.html>.

To register to vote and to request an absentee ballot, download the Federal Post Card Application at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpc.html>. You can also obtain this form from the U.S. Embassy. Fill it out and send it in, following the guidelines for your state. A postage-paid envelope template, valid if you are using the Embassy's APO or diplomatic pouch system, is available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/returnenvelope.html>. You may submit this envelope to the American Citizens Services Unit at the U.S. Embassy and we will return it on your behalf.

Each state has different voting procedures. Information about your state's procedures is available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/vagchapter3.html>. Information about your state's deadlines to register and vote is available at

<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/primarycal.html>. A calendar of 2008 election dates should soon be available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/primarycal.html>.

States sometimes make last-minute changes. There may be late changes to your state's voting calendar, procedures or deadlines. When these occur, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) will issue a News Release. News Releases are available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/releases.html>. You should also look for changes in your state's regulations, deadlines and mailing addresses at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag/vagerrata.html>.

Be an educated voter. Non-partisan information about candidates, their voting records, and their positions on issues is widely available and easy to obtain via the Internet. Use the links appearing on the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at <http://www.fvap.gov/links/otherlinks.html>, or choose any one of several search engines to locate articles and information.

An emergency ballot is available. If your state's ballot receipt deadline is less than 3 weeks away, and you have not yet received the blank ballot from local officials, you can download an emergency ballot, write in the names of the candidates and the offices for which they are running, and send it back in time to meet your state's ballot receipt deadline. The emergency ballot (SF-186, Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot, or FWAB) is available on the Internet at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/forms.html>.

The Voting Assistance Officer at the U.S. Embassy is available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact the Voting Assistance Officer, call (02) 3116-180 or send an e-mail to VoteSkopje@state.gov. Look for notices from the U.S. Embassy throughout the year relating to the 2008 elections.

Again, we strongly encourage you to begin this process as soon as possible.

USCIS FEES INCREASE

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) advises that, as of July 30, there is a substantial increase in the cost of many services offered. The cost of applying for Relative Petitions, Petitions for Immigrant Workers, Fiancée Petitions, and other similar services are increased. U.S. citizens are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these changes at www.uscis.gov.

DHS REMINDS CARRIERS AND TRAVELING PUBLIC ABOUT THE END OF THE TEMPORARY WHTI ACCOMMODATION

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is reminding air carriers and the traveling public that the temporary Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) accommodation allowing U.S. citizens to travel by air within the Western Hemisphere using a Department of State (DOS) official proof of passport application receipt will end as scheduled at midnight on Sept. 30, 2007. U.S. citizens who departed the country under this travel accommodation prior to Oct. 1 with a Department of State

official proof of passport application receipt and government-issued identification will be readmitted with these same documents if returning to the United States after Sept. 30.

As a reminder, through Sept. 30, 2007, U.S. citizens traveling to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, or Bermuda who have applied for, but not yet received, passports can temporarily enter and depart from the United States by air with a government issued photo identification and DOS official proof of application for a passport.

Effective Oct. 1, 2007, U.S. Citizens traveling by air to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda must present a passport or other WHTI-compliant documentation to enter or depart from the United States. It is always strongly recommended that U.S. Citizens verify the specific documentary requirements for their destination country.

DHS and DOS announced the temporary WHTI accommodation for air travel in June. The federal government made this accommodation due to longer than expected processing times for passport applications in the face of record-breaking demand.

WHTI was mandated by Congress in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, and addresses core 9/11 Commission findings for secure and reliable identification documents. It requires all travelers to and from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda to present a passport or other approved document that establishes the bearer's identity and nationality in order to enter or re-enter the United States. For more information about WHTI approved travel documentation, please visit our website at www.dhs.gov. For information on obtaining a U.S. passport please go to www.travel.state.gov.

LEAVING MACEDONIA?

If you are departing from Macedonia after a long stay here, and you formally registered your stay with the Embassy, please be sure to "cancel" your registration when you leave.

If you registered online, you can deregister yourself by visiting the <http://travelregistration.state.gov> site. If you registered with the Embassy, you can either call us or send us an e-mail.

REPORTING INTERNET FRAUD

We have all heard stories about or seen spam emails that guarantee a huge payoff if we provide a stranger with our bank details, or wire thousands of dollars to an unknown person in far-away country who will then send us millions in lottery winnings in return. To help combat the spread of these scams, financial and otherwise, the FBI has set up a new on-line resource at <http://www.ic3.gov/> where you can report internet fraud. The website includes tips on fraud prevention and examples of the latest scams.



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for American citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 311-6180, or at consularskopje@state.gov. This newsletter is also available on the American Citizens Services page of our website at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov>