

DLG BLOG

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Topic: REAL ID Act

Title: Get the Facts about REAL ID

You are probably aware that REAL ID documents are being issued to citizens throughout the United States. This can be a source of confusion and misinformation. [Here is a snapshot of facts about REAL ID.](#)

The REAL ID Act of 2005 is a cooperative effort between the federal government and states to ensure high standards for personal ID documents, such as state driver's licenses. The standards apply to both the process of verifying an individual's identity and the material quality (including security features) of the card itself. The overarching goal is to increase national security.

An individual will need a REAL ID document to:

- Enter any federal facility where personal ID is required.
- Enter a nuclear power plant.
- Board a federally-regulated commercial aircraft. [However, a standard driver's license or ID card will be accepted if the traveler also presents a valid passport or other acceptable form of ID.](#)

The implementation dates for these situations are being phased in gradually, with boarding aircraft as the final phase (2016, at the time of publication). See the [current implementation timelines](#) here.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories must produce and offer residents the option of a REAL ID card. States go through a rigorous process of proving to the Department of Homeland Security that they've met the REAL ID standards. A few states have already achieved full compliance; others have been granted extensions. (Find out [where states stand regarding REAL ID compliance](#).)

In most cases, a REAL ID card resembles the standard license or ID card but has a gold circle with star cutout at the front, upper right corner. States who achieve compliance in stages may issue partially-compliant licenses and ID cards with a solid gold star (or similar icon). Non-REAL ID licenses and cards issued by a state include the caveat, "NOT FOR FEDERAL OFFICIAL USE" in black, in place of the gold circle-star symbol. Such cards are not valid in any of the federal access situations listed above. (The [I.D. Checking Guide](#) includes images and descriptions.) Each state agency decides which of its agencies will accept non-REAL ID cards as proof of ID.

The REAL ID card is designed to improve national security but is **not a national ID card**. There is no federal database of information collected by states and territories during the application process.

Applying for a REAL ID card is optional for every U.S. citizen. To find out what specific documents you will need to apply for a REAL ID card, check with your state DMV.

For more information, please visit the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security website](#) and search “REAL ID.”

Sources:

[REAL ID Frequently Asked Questions for the Public](#) (U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security)