

U.S. swamped with passport applications

by UPI

WASHINGTON - The U.S. State Department has so many passport applications to process, it is asking diplomats abroad to return to the United States and help clear the backlog.

The Washington Times reported Monday that the department is offering to pay travel expenses and living costs for those willing to volunteer for monthlong assignments in U.S. passport offices.

Thousands of U.S. residents have canceled summer trips out of the country because they could not get passports, The Times said.

An estimated 3 million passport requests are waiting to be processed.

The enormous demand stems from a law passed this year requiring all U.S. citizens to present the federal travel document upon flying home from Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean.

The State Department admitted it underestimated the number of passports that would be needed and said it hopes to have the problem solved by late September, by which time another 400 personnel should be working in the passport offices.

Until then, travelers can re-enter the country with official proof of a pending passport application, which can be found on the department's Web site, travel.state.gov.

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