

ePermits: Providing Online Access to Permit Applications

As part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) overall eGovernment initiative to transform and enhance the delivery of its programs, services, and information, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) launched its new electronic permitting system (ePermits). ePermits is a Web-based tool that gives customers the ability to apply for a permit, check its status, and view it online. Submitting applications and receiving permits via the Internet will save customers a tremendous amount of time and effort on one of APHIS' more paper-intensive processes. This new process also enables Federal regulatory officials to issue, track, and rapidly verify the validity of import permits, thus reducing data-entry, processing, and delivery time and expense.

Current Release

The ePermits system is a large initiative that has been in development for several years and is being implemented in multiple phases. Currently, ePermits customers can apply for the following Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) and Biotechnology and Regulatory Services (BRS) permits online:

- PPQ Form 526—Application for Permit to Move Live Plant Pests or Noxious Weeds
- PPQ Form 585—Application for Permit to Import Timber or Timber Products
- PPQ Form 587—Application for Permit to Import Plants or Plant Products
- PPQ Form 588—Application for Permit to Import Plants and Plant Products for Experimental Purposes
- PPQ Form 621—Application for Protected Plant Permit to Engage in the Business of Importing, Exporting, or Reexporting Terrestrial Plants
- Biotechnology Notifications

Veterinary Services (VS) is in the process of finalizing its system and plans to launch its ePermits section on July 3, 2006. The following VS permits will be available online at that time:

- VS 16-3—Application to Import or Transport Controlled Material or Organisms or Vectors
- VS 16-7—Additional Information for Cell Cultures and their Products (supplement to VS 16-3)
- VS Notification of On-Hold Shipment

In addition to online applications, ePermits also features a payment engine that allows customers to pay permit application fees, when applicable, as part of the online process. This feature is designed and operated in a way to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of applicant information. The system collects, maintains, uses, and disseminates information only as authorized by law and, as necessary, to carry out agency responsibilities.

More Advances Underway

The ePermits system is an ongoing effort to improve citizens' knowledge of and access to USDA by enhancing service delivery and improving internal efficiency by promoting technology-based solutions. The next phase will bring even more services to accommodate our customers. Expected in late 2006, ePermits will feature these additional permit applications:

- PPQ Form 525—Application for Permit to Receive Soil,
- PPQ Form 546—Agreement for Postentry Quarantine State Screening Notice,
- PPQ Form 586—Application for Permit to Transit Plants and/or Plant Products through the United States.
- BRS Form 2000—Application for the Importation, Interstate Movement, and Field Testing of Genetically Engineered Organisms.

The next phase of ePermits will also include a feature to generate and print shipment labels containing barcodes. When a Federal inspector scans these barcoded labels, he or she can immediately confirm that the permit associated with that label is valid. This capability will result in improved turnaround times and reduces the chance that the inspector will reject the shipment because the permit can't be verified.

The implementation of what is known as the State concurrence process for PPQ and BRS-issued permits will be another feature of ePermits in the near future. The State concurrence process will enable PPQ and BRS to send a permit application to applicable States so they can review the application and comment on it. For example, if a specific State is experiencing a plant disease outbreak, it may request that APHIS place special conditions on a permit, such as restricting the importation of specific items from other States that could hamper eradication efforts. Managing the traffic of the State concurrence process online will expedite communications that previously entailed facsimile and overnight mail.

User Registration

To comply with government-wide initiatives, ePermits users are required to complete a registration process called eAuthentication. USDA's eAuthentication is a new system used by USDA agencies that enables individuals to obtain user-identification accounts that allow access to certain USDA Web applications and services through the Internet. The Web-based service identifies and validates USDA customers before they can use participating USDA Web-based business applications. This system provides a unique user-identification code that a USDA Web user can present to any participating USDA Web site, therefore reducing the burden on customers to register for and maintain separate identities with every online system. To learn more about USDA's eAuthentication, please visit <http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov>.

For More Information on ePermits

You can learn more at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/permits>.

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