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Tighter controls on speeding: new regulations aim to crack down on traffic offenders.

Tougher penalties for traffic offenders

Effective 1 January 2005, tougher regulations will come into place to improve road traffic safety.

In the spring of 2004, following a one-year delay, the Federal Council approved the 0.5 blood-alcohol level, zero tolerance for certain drugs, and tougher regulations for removal of driving licences with effect from 1 January 2005.

Once the tighter regulations come into force next year, the police can conduct breathalyser tests at any time and anywhere. Drivers must therefore expect increased checks for driving under the influence of alcohol. The blood-alcohol level is determined by a breath-

alyser test. A level of 0.5 (previously 0.8) already indicates inability to drive. Blood samples are the most suitable way to determine drunkenness. If the breathalyser test shows a blood-alcohol level of 0.8 or more, a blood sample must be taken. Blood samples are not taken for levels between 0.50 to 0.79 if the breathalysed person acknowledges the result in writing.

Penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol depend on the blood-alcohol level and the record of offences. Drivers with blood-alcohol levels between 0.50 and 0.79 are subject to a fine and/or imprisonment. If there has been no previous driving offence, a warning is issued. From 0.8 the

driving licence is compulsorily removed for at least three months. A fine and/or custodial sentence is also imposed.

Persons whose ability to drive a vehicle is impeded due to narcotics or medication are deemed unfit to drive, and a blood sample is taken to prove their condition. Saliva, urine or sweat tests conducted by the police can merely support a suspicion but are not evidence in themselves. A person is deemed unfit to drive if the following substances are found in the bloodstream: cannabis, cocaine, heroin, morphine and designer drugs such as Ecstasy. In the case of other substances, the three-point principle is applied

(police observations, medical examinations and laboratory findings).

Repeat offenders are dealt with more harshly. Serious and moderately serious offences under the road traffic law are accumulated and result in a longer licence confiscation period. Persons who are found guilty of three serious violations or four moderately serious violations within ten years are banned from driving for at least two years. If they subsequently commit another road traffic offence, they are banned for life.

The legal texts can be downloaded from www.astra.admin.ch.

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USA tightens entry conditions

Following the attacks of 11 September, the USA has modified its entry conditions in a number of ways. Passports issued after 26 October 2004 must contain biometric data (electronically stored photo) so that holders can continue to enter the USA without a visa for a maximum stay of 90 days under the terms of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

However, since Switzerland and other countries which are covered by the VWP are unable to add biometric data to their passports within the set deadline, the US authorities asked the US Congress last March to authorise postponement of the deadline. This summer, Congress and President Bush approved a postponement to 26 October 2005.

As of 26 October, 2004, holders of an old non-machine-readable Swiss passport (1985 model)

which is valid until no later than 31 December 2007, may only enter the USA with a visa, irrespective of the length of their stay. Persons wishing to travel to the USA after the biometric data deadline (26 October 2005) without a visa or biometric passport must have a machine-readable passport issued prior to the deadline and valid at least six months beyond the date of their planned stay. The new Swiss passport issued in 2003 complies with the provisions on machine readability.

Another condition for visa-free entry under the terms of the VWP is that, with effect from the deadline, Switzerland – in common with the other 26 countries covered by the VWP – must prove that it has a programme for the introduction of passports with biometric data. The federal administration is currently drawing up a feasibility study to be submitted to the Federal Council. Additional information is available at: <http://www.bap.admin.ch/d/brennpunkt/index.htm>.

In conjunction with the possible extension of the deadline for introduction of biometric passports as mentioned above, the US authorities have also decided to include travellers from VWP countries in the so-called US Visit Program from 30 September 2004. This means that Swiss citizens will also have their fingerprints and their photograph taken on entry.

Please note that these statements reflect the current state of findings. Changes may occur at any time as a result of decisions by the US authorities.

Binding information is available exclusively from the US authorities (US Department of State website: <http://www.state.gov>). BDK

New Initiative

The following new people's initiative has been launched and is open for signature: "For a sensible cannabis policy with effective protection for young people" (until 20 January 2006) Pro Jugendschutz – gegen Drogenkriminalität (PJgD), Josefstrasse 182, 8005 Zurich
You can download signature forms for current initiatives from www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html. BDK

A new health insurance card that fits any wallet

Since 1 June, 2004, a health insurance card has been in use in the European region which simplifies access to healthcare for persons who fall ill abroad.

On 1 June, 2004, the E111 form, which entitled tourists and business travellers to immediate necessary medical treatment in the case of illness or accident during a temporary stay in an EU/EFTA member state, was replaced by the credit-card-sized European health insurance card.

Not all EU/EFTA countries – including Switzerland – were able to introduce this card on 1 June, 2004. Since then, therefore, a form has continued to be issued until the transition period expiry date (31 December 2005). A new form

E111, containing the same information as the European health insurance card, has been in use since 1 June, 2004, and will remain in force until the deadline. Also since 1 June, 2004, Swiss healthcare providers have been accepting the new European health insurance card as proof of entitlement to treatment, guaranteeing the medically required treatment subject to the type of service and provisional length of stay. Switzerland intends to introduce the Eu-

ropean health insurance card on 1 January, 2006. Until then, Swiss health insurance companies must issue the new E111 form. As of 1 January, 2006, persons insured in Switzerland need only show their European health insurance card to obtain treatment in an EU/EFTA country.

For detailed information, contact your health insurance company or visit www.sozialversicherungen.admin.ch, keyword "KV-EU-Versicherer" BDK

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Switzerland and the UN

The Federal Council has submitted to parliament its annual report entitled "Switzerland and the UN", documenting Switzerland's collaboration with the United Nations Organisation as well as the international organisations based in Switzerland. The report presents the experiences which Switzerland has acquired as a member state of the UN since March 2003 and devotes a special chapter to the UN reforms and the Swiss contribution to this process.

The report is available online (http://www.dfae.admin.ch/sub_uno/g/uno.html) or in the form of an illustrated brochure which can be ordered free of charge from the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (DFA). Please include your name, address and the preferred language (D, F, I) and send your order to:

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