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Industry Seeks Clarity on TWIC

Rules to be in development for "a couple of years"

Implementation of the government's Transportation Worker Identification Credential has generally been smooth, but industry representatives would still like more clarity in the national security program's regulations and processes.

Industry outreach will be especially important as regulations are developed for the electronic TWIC card readers that will be used at marine terminals and other facilities.

"I think the reader roll-out will be as challenging if not more challenging than the roll-out of the TWIC cards was," said Mark MacDonald, vice president of security at the Pacific Maritime Association.

The Transportation Security Administration and the Coast Guard are the lead government agencies involved in TWIC. The program is being developed in two phases, with development and issuance of the TWIC cards basically completed as of April 15 this year.

TSA enrolled about 1.3 million transportation industry workers, with most of the applications being approved quickly through the agency's automated system, John Schwartz, assistant TWIC program manager, told the Maritime Security Expo Tuesday in Long Beach.

Applications that are completed through the automated system take about 10 to 14 days to complete, Schwartz said. About 62,000 of the background checks nationwide required human intervention due to questions about the applicants' qualifications for a TWIC card, and those cases have taken longer, he added.

Transportation workers at government-designated secure facilities such as marine terminals currently use their TWICs as "flash cards," with guards at the terminal gates visually matching the picture on the card with the worker.

The next phase of TWIC will be development of rules and specifications for the electronic readers that will be used to process the biometric information on the cards. Coast Guard Commander David Murk, chief of cargo facilitation, said the advance notice of proposed rule-making was issued in March, but publication of the final rules is "a couple of years off"

as the government agencies process comments from the industry.

MacDonald urged the government to make the rules as precise as possible. Marine terminal operators' experiences with the TWIC card rules so far indicates that some workers will use any gray areas in the regulations to their advantage, he said.

Citing a provision in the rules for workers who have completed the application process but not yet received their cards, MacDonald said employers may have to escort these workers to their jobs every day until the cards are issued. This is not a fail-safe system, and employers must devote extra time and resources to the process.

"This is just one of the nuances involved in TWIC," he said.

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