



Office of Communications

**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

USCIS Update

July 9, 2008

USCIS Continues Suspension of Premium Processing Service for Religious Workers (R-1) Nonimmigrant Visa Classification

WASHINGTON—U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced today that the suspension of premium processing service for religious worker (R-1) nonimmigrant visa petitions will continue at least until January 7, 2009. A previous six-month suspension was [announced](#) on January 4, 2008.

The [Premium Processing Service](#) provides faster processing of certain employment-based petitions and guarantees a 15-calendar day processing time. Due to the complexities with adjudicating R-1 nonimmigrant visa petitions, USCIS cannot reasonably ensure a level of processing service within 15 calendar days.

On April 25, 2007, USCIS proposed significant revisions to its regulations related to the special immigrant and nonimmigrant (R-1) religious worker visa classifications. The proposed rule suggested steps to eliminate fraud in the religious worker program and discusses potential vulnerabilities addressed in an August 2005 Benefit Fraud Assessment conducted by USCIS' Office of Fraud Detection and National Security. USCIS is currently considering comments on the [proposed rule](#) and promulgating the final rule.

USCIS will continue processing R-1 nonimmigrant visa petitions which include established procedures designed to ensure the legitimacy of the petitioner and statements made in the petition. The procedures may include inspections, evaluations, verifications and compliance reviews for religious organizations – procedures that exceed the 15-day guarantee for premium processing.

In the future, if USCIS is able to properly process these cases within 15 calendar days of receipt, the Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) requesting R-1 nonimmigrant visa classification may once again be available for premium processing services. Additionally, USCIS may prescribe additional conditions of availability on the Premium Processing Service for religious worker petitions.

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