

## December deadlines for Central American TPS renewal



This image shows damage in Tegucigalpa, Honduras caused by Hurricane Mitch in October 1998.

By Mary Turck , TC Daily Planet  
October 26, 2008

Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans now in the United States on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) visas must renew these visas by December deadlines or lose legal status. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) announced this month that it will extend TPS to July 5, 2010 for Nicaraguans and Hondurans and to September 9, 2010 for Salvadorans. TPS extension is not automatic. Each individual must re-apply. Nicaraguans and Hondurans must reapply by December 1, 2008 and Salvadorans must reapply by December 30, 2008.

To reapply, each person must file specific forms, which have been recently revised. Only the newest versions of the forms will be accepted. There are separate forms for extension of TPS status and for extension of work authorization.

John Keller, director of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM), says this year's renewal is different from past practice. One difference is the early announcement of renewal deadlines, rather than the last-minute announcements of the past. A more significant difference is that there will be no automatic renewal of work authorization cards this year. Everyone will have to re-apply for work authorization, paying a hefty \$340 fee (increased in 2007 from the previous \$180 level.)

Keller warns that people should not wait until the last minute to apply. In the past, renewals have sometimes taken months. If people wait until the last minute, their work authorization may expire and they will no longer be eligible to continue working.

**Getting help with renewal**  
In the Twin Cities, the [Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota](#) will provide assistance in completing necessary forms for a requested donation of \$110. According to the Center, no one will be turned away for inability to pay. The Immigration Law Center phone number is 651-641-1011 or 1-800-223-1368 .

**What is TPS?** Temporary Protected Status may be granted to people whose homelands are experiencing temporary negative conditions, such as armed conflict or environmental disasters. The decision is made by the Secretary of Homeland Security, on a country-by-country basis. Some Salvadorans were granted TPS in the early 1990s because of the civil war in El Salvador. Other TPS decisions were made because of Hurricane Mitch in 1999 (Honduras and Nicaragua) and because of a series of earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001. TPS applies to about 229,000 Salvadorans, about 3,500 Nicaraguans and about 70,000 Hondurans. It is not available to new applicants from those countries, but may be extended for persons already holding TPS status.

"This year, we have had two Salvadorans on TPS who are experiencing the same economic crisis that all of us are," Keller said. "One man lost his home and didn't know where he was going to find the fee." But, said Keller, "you have to come up with the money somewhere. Being on TPS alone will not get you a work card and without the work card, you can't work."

"TPS is an extremely important humanitarian program the U.S. has had for many years," says Keller, but it is a temporary program and "there currently is no legal way for anyone who is on TPS or has been on TPS — in some cases for 14 years — to become a permanent resident." Only permanent residents can become citizens of the United States. Keller says that ILCM and partners "have been trying to find a legal path to permanency for people who have bought homes and had kids here." That, however, is a policy matter

and can only be changed by Congress.

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