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U.S., Canada Start Passenger List Talks

By LESLIE MILLER, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON - U.S. and Canadian officials have begun discussing ways to share information about airline passengers without running afoul of Canada's privacy laws, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said Friday.

U.S. officials are working on a computerized screening program that would check the background of every airline passenger to ensure terrorists and other dangerous people don't board planes.

Privacy advocates are wary, concerned the program could lead to government snooping and innocent people being mistakenly identified because their names are similar to those on government watch lists.

Negotiations with the European Commission over a separate program resulted in an agreement that the Homeland Security Department would limit the type of passenger information collected and the amount of time it is stored. The commission also agreed to allow passenger data to be used in testing the Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System, or CAPPs II.

CAPPs II would screen all passengers by checking information such as name, address and date of birth against commercial and government databases.

Officials would code passengers using one of three color ratings. Passengers designated as "red" would be barred from flying, passengers who raised questions would be classified as "yellow" and go through extra security checks, and those designated as "green" would go through routine screening.

At a news conference with Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan, Ridge said, "We hope we can achieve the same result as we did with the European Union."

McLellan said Canadian officials "want to understand both the details of and the timing of that program as it rolls out."

Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson told The Associated Press this week that officials want to begin testing the program this spring.

Peter Swire, Ohio State University law professor and President Clinton's privacy counselor, said the Homeland Security Department could face tricky negotiations with many countries as they seek to implement the program.

"These countries are trying to balance security and civil liberties, just like we are," Swire said. "It will be a country-by-country decision where they strike the balance between cooperating with Ridge and sticking with their privacy laws."

