

The International Trade Data System Program



The International Trade Data System (ITDS) program supports those federal agencies working with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to develop the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE), a new CBP trade processing system. ACE is being designed to enhance national border security and expedite lawful trade by allowing for unprecedented integration of information and communication between CBP, other participating government agencies (PGAs), and the trade community. The ITDS program assists the PGAs in identifying, documenting, and executing their plan to leverage ACE to improve their business operations and further their agency missions. To this end, the program spearheads the production and maintenance of the ITDS Standard Data Set (SDS), a comprehensive, streamlined collection of data requirements related to international trade and U.S. border regulatory and enforcement processes the PGAs will need in ACE. The goal of this data harmonization effort is to support the ITDS vision of a seamless automated approach to federal regulation at our borders, or, in other words, a “single window”¹.

In fiscal year 2006, 31.3 million Customs entries were filed for imported shipments. Approximately thirty percent of those shipments involved regulation by government agencies other than CBP. Today, interactions between the government and the trade community frequently depend on time-consuming, resource-intensive paper reporting. With a “single window”, information about a commodity, such as an inbound automobile, will be collected via ACE. CBP and PGAs, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for example, will have real-time access to this information to meet their regulatory or statistical requirements. The decision to clear or reject the automobile for entry into U.S. commerce will therefore be based upon immediate information exchange—the result will be more effective enforcement and risk analysis of trade flows.

Approximately 30 PGAs are involved in the project. That number is expected to grow with the instatement of the SAFE Port Act, signed into law on October 25, 2006. The act states that “All Federal agencies that require documentation for clearing or licensing the importation and exportation of cargo shall participate in the ITDS.” As the number of PGAs grows, so too will the quantity and quality of critical security, public health, public safety, and environmental protection information centralized in the ACE common electronic platform. The ITDS “single window” vision is now in the process of being realized, and will come to full fruition with the implementation of ACE across all relevant federal agencies.

Benefits of PGA integration into ACE:

- Eliminates the need for multiple and redundant government data reporting and inefficient paper-based systems, saving time and money for both government and the private sector. This results in higher trade compliance and a more vibrant economy through lower time-to-market costs.
- Increases the accuracy and completeness of international trade data and facilitates a more efficient flow of information between and among federal agencies.
- Improves CBP-PGA collaboration at the border, resulting in faster and more efficient cargo release for legitimate trade.

¹ The “single window” concept was born from ITDS’ beginnings as a pilot information technology initiative of the National Performance Review. On September 11, 2001, the ITDS pilot was discontinued due to operational considerations following the terrorist attacks. Its “single window” vision of an integrated, government-wide system for the electronic collection, use, and dissemination of international trade and transportation data, was subsequently incorporated into ACE.

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