



Resolving Census Bureau Warnings Will Be Easier in ACE

The U.S. Census Bureau (Census Bureau) is the premier source of information about the American people and the economy. As part of its mission, its Foreign Trade Division (FTD) compiles the official merchandise trade statistics that measure goods traded between the United States and other countries based on import and export data collected from various electronic and paper sources. These data represent shipments through more than 400 ports of entry and exit in the United States, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Today, approximately 99 percent of the import transactions are received electronically by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the Automated Commercial System (ACS). FTD edits the data and transmits warning messages to the trade where the data fall outside the usual limits. On a monthly basis, FTD reviews over eight million line-level transactions from entry summaries and Foreign Trade Zone admissions. Within the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE), FTD expects to continue editing and extracting these transactional data just as before with ACS, though with a more sophisticated program for the benefit of the trade, CBP and partnering agencies.

“The work of ACE involves many branches within FTD,” explains Diane C. Oberg, Census Bureau’s ACE/ITDS Coordinator. The Customs Systems Requirements Branch, in particular, works with CBP. This branch prepares documents defining what FTD expects from ACE, and then works with CBP to prepare detailed business rules and to test them after their programming in ACE. Testing for ACE initial entry summary filing is complete, and FTD is pleased with the support that CBP has provided. FTD looks forward to working with CBP for deployment of ACE anti-dumping and countervailing duty case management and harmonized tariff system capabilities.

Census Override Functionality Explained

As ACE development began in earnest in this decade, the Census Bureau introduced the override functionality, and none too soon according to the trade and CBP. Consider that upon receipt of a Census edit warning message under the current ACS, a CBP import specialist consults with the filer, obtains additional documentation and then either overrides the warning message or rejects the entry summary. If rejected, the filer is required to refile or dispute the Census warning via a paper exchange with CBP that delays the entry summary process. Under ACE, however, a filer will need only to correct the entry summary or provide a predefined explanatory override code to address a Census warning message. Moreover, the filer can submit the override code either preemptively, with the entry summary or reactively, after having filed the entry summary. The preemptive option is for situations in which, even though the data are correct, the filer knows a warning will be generated. The filer simply submits the override code along with the entry summary data. In the reactive submission, the filer submits just the override code once the warning is received and does not have to refile the entry summary. This will result in faster processing of entry summary data by CBP and will allow the Census Bureau to capture valid import data more quickly.

In anticipation of ACE, FTD began working with CBP in the late 1990s on its National Customs System Prototype. Its promise of more functionality in entry summary processing led FTD to develop a larger set of tariff-related business data and a more comprehensive set of edits. At that time, too, was born the idea of the "Census Override" submitted by the trade in response to a FTD edit warning message, or in other words, a way for the trade to explain to FTD and CBP why their data are correct.

Additional benefits the Census Bureau expects to see from its participation in ACE/ITDS include the following:

- More powerful edits to capture keying mistakes and misclassification of commodities;
- More meaningful messages to the trade to resolve Census warnings;
- Quicker resolution of error messages, by allowing the trade to resolve them electronically which will reduce paper exchange between CBP and the trade and give the Census Bureau better information about why the entry summary data are unusual;
- A shift of control over the reformatting of entry summary data from CBP systems to FTD systems, enabling FTD to respond quickly to legislative and trade reporting changes; and
- A view through the ACE Secure Data Portal to examine entry summary and manifest data, to find importer contact information for problem resolution, to maintain business data reference files and to research data reporting issues.