U.S. Customs Holds and Exams

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has very broad authority to inspect import cargo, including commercial shipments. CBP can choose any shipment for exam. CBP does several different types of exams, for any variety of reasons. Most of the exams are random checks and others are targeted at specific issues with some particular types of shipments. Examination may include one or more of the following:

**VACIS / (NII) / X-Ray Exam**
Using a gamma ray imaging system to examine the container’s contents without breaking the seal. This could take average of 24 to 72 working hours. It may take longer than this if the port is backlogged with other exams.

**CET Exam**
CET Exam is a physical examination of any import container entering the territory of the US. You can expect that it will be transported to a Customs Examination Station (CES). It may requires complete unloading and staging of the shipment for piece by piece examination of the cargo.
MET Exam
Team of U.S. Customs officials that examine invoices and packing lists on a random basis, it could lead to other exam. Most common problems are invoices with incorrect values shown (underreporting value) or vague product descriptions.

USDA exam
USDA is usually looking for insect infestation or improper wood packaging. USDA may do either a tailgate exam, an intensive exam, X-ray exam and other exams depending on what they find.

FDA related
CBP will release the shipment, but there will still have FDA hold on it. You could pick-up your shipment, but can NOT sell or alter until FDA hold is lifted. FDA will send you notification when you can use or sell or if the shipment must be returned to your vendor (normally it could take 4 weeks from FDA).

The container will be move to Centralized Examination Station (CES) for physical inspection. For consolidated shipment, the individual shipment will be examined at Container Fright Station (CFS). CBP may place several types of “hold” on import container and this type of “customs hold” must be removed before the importer can pick up the container.

- Manifest hold – lack of information from the importing carrier manifest.
- Commercial enforcement hold – CBP needs to verify the product standard safety, copy right and trademark.

CBP enforces the import laws and regulations on the behalf of other U.S Federal agencies. U.S. Customs uses their large database to select importer, carrier manifest and customs entries to identify “high risk” cargo. This selected target will be place under U.S customs hold and exam. CBP will request addition information from the broker to make decision of either release or detain the cargo.

Container is examined by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the importer is charged a fee by the Centralized Examination Station (CES). CBP does not charge the importers directly for performing customs exams during their normal working hours.
When cargo placed on holds and exam, the (CES) will charge the importer for various types of costs and expenses. **All these charges that occur during the exam it is the importer’s responsibility to pay even if these holds and exams were not due to the importer’s fault.** There are ports in the US, which you can choose the CES location, but sometimes CBP will designate a specific CES for exam the container.

For more information or answers to specific questions please contact our office at 770-852-6829 or email us at info@cssbrokers.com.