



CBP's Winkowski Says Exports Next Focus for Agency

NEWTON, Mass. -- As CBP wraps up implementation of its Centers for Excellence and Expertise, the next focus for the agency will be on exports, said Acting Commissioner Tom Winkowski in a speech at the Northeast Cargo Symposium on Nov. 7. "The area of exports represents a huge opportunity," said Winkowski at the Coalition of New England Companies for Trade (CONNECT) event. "If we're going to be competitive in the world market, we have to reduce costs in how we do business day in and day out," he said. That means ensuring compliance not only with U.S. export requirements, but also with the regulatory system in the importing country so that goods aren't held up at the port overseas.

One aspect of this effort is trusted trader programs bolstered by mutual recognition agreements, said Winkowski. If countries recognize CBP trusted trader programs as ensuring compliance with their import regulations, U.S. exports could avoid being put in the same "import bucket" as goods from other countries, he said. That would mean fewer delays and less cost. CBP is currently developing a framework for a Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) export component (see 13082223), and has mutual recognition agreements with seven countries: New Zealand, Canada, Jordan, Japan, South Korea, the European Union, and Taiwan.

Another effort already underway is partnerships with other countries to expedite clearance of U.S. exports in foreign countries, Winkowski said. CBP currently has an outbound preclearance arrangement at Laredo Airport where Mexican customs officials clear U.S. export shipments before crossing the border. Winkowski said CBP has plans to expand this program to the Port of Otay Mesa in San Diego and the Port of Santa Teresa, New Mexico.

CBP is also part of an international effort to harmonize customs procedures spearheaded by the World Customs Organization, said Winkowski. To make sure the outcome of negotiations work for industry, however, the trade community needs to get more involved at the international level. "I think at CBP we have strong partnerships around the world, but we don't have the trade community with us," said Winkowski. "We're going to start ... going to associations and bringing the trade with us overseas to begin that process of talking about standardization," given the importance of having industry involved from the very beginning.

A multitude of agencies have their hand in exports, and that complicates matters for CBP, said Winkowski. Not only will CBP have to think about overseas import requirements, but also Census rules and licensing by the Commerce and State Departments, among others. Winkowski sees that as an opportunity for CBP. A recent Advisory Committee on Commercial Operations survey on exports reported that industry's biggest concern on the export side is the amount of paperwork involved, he said. "I see that as our chance to come in and make a difference," said Winkowski, including by looking at license requirements. "I think we can come in as CBP and the trade community ... and really influence those policies that are being considered," he said. -- *Brian Feito*

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