

C-TPAT: Program Overview

C-TPAT seeks to safeguard the world's vibrant trade industry from terrorists, maintaining the economic health of the U.S. and its neighbors. The partnership develops and adopts measures that add security but do not have a chilling effect on trade, a difficult balancing act.

A growing partnership

Begun in November 2001 with just seven major importers as members, as of June 2011, the partnership has grown. Today, more than 10,000 certified partners that span the gamut of the trade community have been accepted into the program. These include U.S. importers, U.S./Canada highway carriers; U.S./Mexico highway carriers; rail and sea carriers; licensed U.S. Customs brokers; U.S. marine port authority/terminal operators; U.S. freight consolidators; ocean transportation intermediaries and non-operating common carriers; Mexican and Canadian manufacturers; and Mexican long-haul carriers. These 10,000-plus companies account for over 50 percent (by value) of what is imported into the United States.

Extending the zone of U.S. border security

By extending the United States' zone of security to the point of origin, the customs-trade partnership allows for better risk assessment and targeting, freeing CBP to allocate inspectional resources to more questionable shipments.

The partnership establishes clear supply chain security criteria for members to meet and in return provides incentives and benefits like expedited processing. A corollary is to extend the partnership anti-terrorism principles globally through cooperation and coordination with the international community. Back in 2005, the World Customs Organization the Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade, which compliments and globalizes CBP's and the partnership's cargo security efforts.

How it works

When they join the anti-terror partnership, companies sign an agreement to work with CBP to protect the supply chain, identify security gaps, and implement specific security measures and best practices. Additionally, partners provide CBP with a security profile outlining the specific security measures the company has in place. Applicants must address a broad range of security topics and present security profiles that list action plans to align security throughout their supply chain.

C-TPAT members are considered low-risk and are therefore less likely to be examined. This designation is based on a company's past compliance history, security profile, and the validation of a sample international supply chain.

An emerging focus: Mutual Recognition Arrangements

CBP has numerous Mutual Recognition Arrangements with other countries. The goal of these arrangements is to link the various international industry partnership programs so that together they create a unified and sustainable security posture that can assist in securing and facilitating global cargo trade.

The goal of aligning partnership programs is to create a system whereby all participants in an international trade transaction are approved by the customs function as observing specified standards in the secure handling of goods and relevant information.

C-TPAT signed its first Mutual Recognition Arrangement with New Zealand in June 2007, and since that time signed similar arrangements with Korea, Japan, Jordan and Canada.