

Customs and International Trade

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Federal Government Looks to Expand C-TPAT Participation and Benefits

On April 14, 2011, Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) introduced a bill that would reauthorize and increase funding for the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) program, the Container Security Initiative and the Automated Targeting System. This is just one facet of a multi-front governmental effort to increase industry awareness and participation in C-TPAT.

C-TPAT is a voluntary cooperative program between U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the trade community. It is designed to strengthen U.S. border security by having importers actively work to ensure the integrity of their own security practices as well as the security practices of their partners in the international supply chain. In return, CBP offers certain benefits to its C-TPAT members, including reduced CBP border inspections, “front of the line” privileges for container examinations, faster business resumption in the event of a disruption in the flow of trade, and eligibility for the Importer Self-Assessment program, which allows an importer to self-police its import activities in lieu of being targeted for CBP audits.

The SAFE Port Reauthorization Act sponsored by Sens. Collins and Murray would provide additional benefits to the C-TPAT program, including offering voluntary security training to industry participants and providing participants an information sharing mechanism on maritime and port security threats. The bill would also authorize CBP to conduct unannounced inspections to ensure that a participant’s security practices are robust.

At CBP’s annual Trade Symposium earlier this month, CBP Commissioner Alan Bersin reiterated his intent to quadruple the number of C-TPAT participants (from 10,000 to 40,000) over the next five years. Bersin recognized the importance of C-TPAT members to receive more benefits in order to increase participation, as many importers have been reluctant to invest in becoming a C-TPAT member given the initiative’s current slate of benefits.

Bersin stated that C-TPAT members should receive the benefit of meeting or exceeding shipment security standards by expediting cargo release and reducing the amount of paperwork required post-release. Bersin also stated that the Department of Homeland Security was examining the possibility of a single, department-wide “trusted trade” program for cargo. CBP has already started to review this request with regard to travelers within CBP by combining multiple existing trusted traveler programs into one program.

Bersin wants to hear suggestions from the trade community on how to further improve the C-TPAT program to broaden its appeal to potential participants.

If you have any questions or would like to provide comments to CBP on how to improve the C-TPAT initiative, please contact one of the Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP [Customs and International Trade](#) attorneys or professionals listed below.

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