



U. S. Customs

Customs – Trade Partnership Against Terrorism



Questions and Answers





Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism Questions and Answers

Q. What is C-TPAT?

A. C-TPAT is the acronym for “Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism.” As its name implies, C-TPAT is a joint Government-Industry program designed to increase security at our borders. Industry participation is on a voluntary basis.

Q. What does participation in C-TPAT require?

A. Businesses must apply to participate in C-TPAT. Participants will sign an agreement that commits them to the following actions:

Conduct a comprehensive self-assessment of supply chain security using the C-TPAT security guidelines jointly developed by Customs and the trade community. These guidelines, which are available for review on the Customs website, encompass the following areas: Procedural Security, Physical Security, Personnel Security, Education and Training, Access Controls, Manifest Procedures, and Conveyance Security.

Submit a supply-chain, security profile questionnaire to Customs.

Develop and implement a program to enhance security throughout the supply chain in accordance with C-TPAT guidelines.

Communicate C-TPAT guidelines to other companies in the supply chain and work toward building the guidelines into relationships with these companies.

Q. Why has Customs rolled out C-TPAT?

A. Customs’ primary focus, because of the tragic events of September 11, is fighting terrorism. This program is a major step in that direction.

Q. What are the benefits of joining? Why should we sign up?

A. Customs has proposed some concrete benefits to companies who participate in this program. Included in these are:

Reduced Customs inspections

Reduced border delays

Entitlement to a Customs account manager

Eligibility for account-based processes

Participation in the war against terrorism

Need certification to proceed with Importer Self Assessment program (ISA)

Q. What is the downside of not participating in the program?

A. Increased inspections; increased border waiting time; exclusion from the next generation of Customs partnership programs; and potentially negative publicity from failure to act with due diligence in the event of a catastrophic event associated with your supply chain.

Q. How do we sign up?

A. After completing a comprehensive survey of the cargo security aspects of their supply chain from foreign point of origin through delivery to U.S. consignee, companies

sign a Customs Memorandum of Understanding (agreement), complete a Supply Chain Security Questionnaire, and submit these to Customs.

Q. It sounds as if joining this program is just a matter of writing a letter and completing a questionnaire. Why do we need assistance?

A. Participating in C-TPAT is more complex than simply completing a questionnaire. Before the required application and questionnaire can be completed, a comprehensive evaluation of security procedures, training, and recordkeeping must be undertaken by your company to ensure that your protocols are in line with Customs C-TPAT standards. These undertakings can be made less burdensome by engaging Strategic Solution Partners.

Q. If this is an evolving program, shouldn't we wait until Customs develops more details?

A. Although C-TPAT is a work in progress, Customs has provided a matrix of standards and will continue to develop the methodology over time in reaction to various situations that occur. Therefore, there is no benefit to taking a "wait and see" attitude. In this world of just-in-time inventories, companies cannot afford to experience supply chain disruptions and the unpredictability that is caused by increased intensive inspections. Not only do border delays cost money, but they also create negative customer perception. Strategic Solution Partners can help get you started on the way toward C-TPAT compliance, while ensuring that your management is kept up-to-date on the latest regulatory updates.

Q. Does the Supply Chain Security Questionnaire have to be submitted with the Customs Memorandum of Understanding?

A. Yes. Customs has published minimum requirements that must be met by companies seeking C-TPAT certification.

Q. Does Customs provide standards with which to measure supply chain security?

A. Yes. Customs has published minimum requirements that must be met by companies seeking C-TPAT certification.

Q. Who is eligible for entry into the C-TPAT program?

A. Currently C-TPAT is open to importers, transportation providers, and brokers. Customs plans to expand the scope of C-TPAT to include other vendors and exporters in the future. Customs hopes to create a community of C-TPAT-approved companies.

Q. When do benefits begin?

A. Benefits begin sixty days after the completion, submission, and approval of the Supply Chain Security Questionnaire.

Q. How will C-TPAT work on an ongoing basis?

A. The C-TPAT program is one of continuous improvement. If there are shortfalls, companies will design action plans, with the assistance of their Customs account manager, that reflect their C-TPAT commitments. Companies will track their progress in fulfilling the required security improvements.

Q. Do C-TPAT requirements apply solely exclusive to a company's internal supply chain?

A. No. The importer is required to ensure that all suppliers of materials, services and transportation – both internally and externally – are fully compliant with C-TPAT guidelines. These outside service providers include brokers, carriers, freight forwarders, and other partners.

Q. Will the information we provide to Customs be made public?

A. No. All information on supply chain security will be kept confidential. Customs will not disclose a company's participation in C-TPAT without its consent. Customs will publicize the names of companies that have not requested confidentiality.

Q. Is participation in C-TPAT limited to low-risk importers?

A. No. C-TPAT is open to all importers. However, there is no guarantee of admission.

Q. Is C-TPAT a viable program for medium and small companies?

A. C-TPAT is important to all companies that import, need to minimize border delays and who wish to participate in future Customs programs and initiatives.

Q. What is Customs' future vision for C-TPAT?

A. Customs is seeking to create a community committed to a strong anti-terrorism partnership.

Q. Must companies undergo a Focused Assessment to participate in C-TPAT?

A. No, but companies that wish to participate in the Importer Self Assessment (ISA) program and other future Customs partnerships must be C-TPAT-certified. For companies that wish to reduce cycle times or eliminate Customs audits, the ISA is an important program.

Q. Can Strategic Solution Partners assist us in making our application to the C-TPAT program?

A. Certainly. Our staff of professionals – which includes Customs attorneys, brokers, security professionals, logisticians, and other transportation professionals – is ready to help our clients fulfill all of the requirements necessary for participation in the C-TPAT program.

Q. Can the Strategic Solution Partners group assist our company in developing an acceptable Supply Chain Security Questionnaire that fulfills Customs requirements?

A. Our staff is fully versed in the Customs requirements of this program. We will assist your company in the creation and completion of the required documentation.

Q. Can Strategic Solution Partners assist our company in conducting a comprehensive self-assessment of our supply chain security protocols?

A. Yes. The Strategic Solution Partners staff is experienced in conducting both diagnostic and comprehensive Customs audits. Strategic Solution Partners professionals have many years of line management experience in real-world transportation environments and have dealt successfully with cargo security as a vital

part of their day-to-day experience. We are prepared to assist in audit preparation, execution, and evaluation.

Q. The requirement to evaluate our business partners' supply chain security procedures seems like a lot of work, especially with staffing constraints. Can Strategic Solution Partners evaluate our business partners on our behalf?

A. Strategic Solution Partners professionals can perform field audits of your business allies' supply chain security procedures to ensure that they are compliant with C-TPAT guidelines. Our staff can evaluate your allies' current protocols and make suggestions for improvement in required areas.

Q. Our company does not have an evolved Cargo Security Program. Can Strategic Solution Partners assist us in creating one that is compliant with Customs C-TPAT guidelines?

A. Yes. Strategic Solution Partners professionals, working in cooperation with your management, can assist in developing and implementing a meaningful and successful Supply Chain Security Protocol that will provide for a safer work environment. A more secure supply chain can give your company the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the C-TPAT program while helping to fight terrorism.

Q. Our company has a highly evolved Cargo Security infrastructure. How can Strategic Solution Partners assist us with the C-TPAT process?

A. Strategic Solution Partners can provide audit services to companies that have a strong security presence to ensure current systems are "best in class" and are being implemented. Since C-TPAT is an evolving environment, Strategic Solution Partners can provide continuing advice to your company to ensure that you are updated regularly on the most current changes in the program. Strategic Solution Partners can be contracted to provide periodic audits designed to ensure your company's continued participation in C-TPAT, since certification can be suspended or revoked.

Q. Is it required that we engage a consulting firm like Strategic Solutions Partners to complete our application?

A. No, the application process is intended to be completed by the firm. However, you might think of it as being much like the IRS intends tax returns to be completed by individuals without professional help. Often the expertise of professionals can save time, money and eliminate administrative burden. In environments with more complex supply chains the assistance of professional logistics expertise can be vital to the timely submission of a complete and accurate application. Strategic Solutions Partners' supply chain experts know the process and have deep experience in developing transportation, logistics and strategic sourcing solutions for international and domestic clients. Contact us today to see how we can help your company gain C-TPAT certification.

Q. How can we contact you?

A. Call Bert Hall at 925.258.0150 or email us at info@sspllc.com.