



Customs Exam

All freight imported into the United States is subject to an examination by U. S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), however it is currently impossible for CBP to physically inspect all cargo so only a percentage of imports are actually inspected. There are several different levels and types of exams that CBP can order, the basics types are:

- ❖ VACIS Exam or X- ray exam: Presently this is the most common exam type especially for ocean freight. A Vehicle And Cargo Inspection System (VACIS) exam is simply an x-ray exam, where CBP x-rays the entire shipment or container. This exam is generally done at first port of entry and is not tied into the customs entry.
- ❖ Intensive: A full exam of all cargo, CBP will strenuously examine the complete shipment.
- ❖ Partial Exam: A limited exam where CBP will inspect a small percentage of the shipment at random, selecting a few boxes to open and inspect.
- ❖ Tailgate exam: For full container ocean shipments only, similar to a partial exam CBP will just open the container and check contents.
- ❖ Team Exam: CBP has several teams that focus on particular aspects of importing, such as the Contraband Enforcement Team (CET) or Manifest Examination Team (MET), these teams can order their own exams on any cargo.
- ❖ Other Government Agency exam: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) or any other government agency that regulates imported goods can also order their own exams.

Why my shipment? CBP selects shipments for exam two ways, the first is based on a classified risk factor number assigned to all shipments by the CBP. The actual formula and criteria used to determine this risk factor is not public information and is closely guarded by the CBP for National Security reasons. We know some of these factors include the importer and foreign shipper of cargo and their history with CBP, the country of origin and the commodity. The second reason CBP selects shipments for exam is purely random. Also a first time importer is almost always going to be inspected.

What CBP is looking for? In today's environment it's a common misconception that CBP is only looking for contraband (Drugs, weapons, etc) during these exams. While a great deal of CBP's effort is searching for these items, it is not the only thing CBP is looking for. When cargo is inspected CBP is also going to confirm that cargo is being classified correctly, and that cargo is also properly marked with country of origin.



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What happens to my cargo when it's selected for exam? CBP will notify the customs broker when an entry is made that CBP wants to examine cargo, at which point the broker will need to make arrangements to move cargo from the bonded warehouse, pier, or airline to a Customs Exam Station (CES) for the inspection. In some cases the warehouse that cargo is located in may also be a CES. In these cases the CES needs to be informed of exam by the broker, so cargo can be placed in exam queue.

A slight exception to this is a VACIS exam. All other exams are tied to the actual customs entry and will be done in the port that customs entry is submitted. However when a shipment is selected for a VACIS exam it is done based on the carriers manifest at first port of call. Cargo in these cases still needs to be transferred to a CES with the proper x-ray equipment for exam.

Please note that it is possible to have more than one exam on a shipment, if a shipment gets selected for a VACIS exam it still can be selected for another exam once the entry is made. Also the CBP may elevate an exam level at anytime, for example a tailgate or VACIS exam can be upgraded to an intensive or CET Team exam.

Who is responsible for any charges related to the exam? CBP considers exams to be part of the normal import process and all additional costs incurred when CBP selects cargo for exam are strictly for the account of the importer. These additional charges may include but are not limited to:

- All trucking/transfer charges from freight location to CES.
- Storage/demurrage charges while cargo waits for exam.
- Any charges for sorting or unloading cargo.
- Any waiting time incurred by trucker.

How long does an exam take? Anytime your cargo is selected for an exam it is going to affect the normal transit time; however this delay greatly depends on the type or types of exams and port of examination. Generally an exam is going to add anywhere from 2 to 8 days to transit time, but these are just estimates based on current conditions, CBP has no time constraints to process an exam once they have selected cargo.