



UNITED STATES CUSTOMS SERVICE

Information Quality Procedures Guide (Version 1.1)

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United States Customs Service
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Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 [Public Law 106-554] requires federal agencies to issue guidelines ensuring and maximizing the quality, utility, objectivity, and integrity of disseminated information. This document serves as the U.S. Customs Service “Procedures for Implementation of the Information Quality Law.”

Mission

The traditional U.S. Customs Service Mission, as outlined in the Tariff Act of 1930, is threefold:

- To assess and collect customs duties on imported merchandise.
- To prevent fraud and smuggling.
- To control carriers, persons, and articles entering and departing the United States. The U.S. Customs Service enforces, in addition to its own statutes, more than 400 provisions of law on behalf of 40 other Federal agencies; all aimed at protecting the quality of American life.

Purpose

This document describes the procedures Customs will follow to ensure the quality of information—including its utility, objectivity, and integrity—as required by Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 [Public Law 106-554].

These procedures are based on, and must be used in conjunction with, both Treasury and OMB guidelines (Chapter 14 of the Treasury Information Technology Manual and OMB guidelines published in the Federal Register on September 28, 2001, January 3, 2002, and February 22, 2002).

These procedures are not intended to be legally binding regulations or mandates. They are not legally enforceable and do not create any rights or impose any legally binding requirements or obligations on Customs or the public. Nothing in these procedures affects any otherwise available judicial review of agency action.

Scope

In accordance with OMB guidance, these procedures become effective on October 1, 2002, and will cover information disseminated on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the information was first disseminated.

The guidelines apply to information disseminated to the public in any medium including textual, graphic, narrative, numerical, or audiovisual forms. The guidelines apply to information that Customs posts on the Internet. The guidelines also apply to Customs sponsored distribution of information – where the agency directs a third party to distribute information or the agency has the authority to review and approve the information before release.

These guidelines focus primarily on dissemination of substantive information rather than information pertaining to basic agency operations. These guidelines do not apply to privileged information or procedural, operational, policy, and internal manuals prepared for the management and operations of Customs.

The guidelines do not override other compelling interests such as privacy, trade secrets, intellectual property, and other confidentiality protections. The guidelines do not apply to hyperlinks to information that others disseminate. The guidelines do not apply to opinions where Customs presentation makes it clear that the material is an opinion or the agency's views rather than fact. In addition, the guidelines do not apply to information disseminated in the following contexts:

- Dissemination of information limited to government employees or agency contractors or grantees.
- Intra- or inter-agency use or sharing of government information.
- Correspondence with individual persons, press releases, archival records, public filings, subpoenas, or adjudicative processes.
- Responses to requests for agency records under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory Committee Act, or other similar laws. High quality data is a performance goal for all Customs information that is disseminated.

Responsibility for assurance of information quality resides with the individual office that produces the data. The Office of Public Affairs is responsible for oversight of Section 515 activities within Customs.

In addition to peer and subject matter expert reviews, the Customs Publications Review Board and the Customs Web Communication Board will ensure the quality of printed and electronic (Internet) information, respectively.

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness and availability of the information to its intended users. To produce useful, policy-relevant information, offices must stay informed of information needs and develop new data, models, and information products where appropriate. Offices will keep informed of information needs through active and ongoing contact with appropriate users.

Customs analytical and statistical publications and other information products will be reviewed by the responsible office within Customs to ensure that they remain relevant and timely and that they address current information needs. On the basis of internal product reviews and consultation with users, and in response to changing needs and emphases, the content of ongoing information products is changed, new products are introduced, and some products are discontinued.

Customs information dissemination process will make information products widely available and broadly accessible. Most reports and other information products are generally available both as printed and electronic documents.

Objectivity

Objectivity involves a focus on ensuring that information is accurate, reliable, and unbiased and that information products are presented in a clear, complete, and well-documented manner. Objectivity is achieved by using reliable data sources and sound analytical techniques, by having information products prepared by qualified people using proven methods, and by carefully reviewing the content of all information products.

IDENTIFY SOURCES

For the purpose of these guidelines, transparency refers to a clear description of the methods, data sources, assumptions, outcomes, and related information that will allow a data user to understand how an information product was designed and produced. Reproducibility of information refers to the ability, in principle, for a qualified individual to use the documentation of methods, assumptions, and data sources to achieve comparable findings. In practice, opportunities for direct reproducibility are often limited by restrictions on access to confidential information.

IDENTIFY SUPPORTING DATA AND MODELS

Customs will make the information it disseminates and the methods used to produce this information as transparent as possible so that it can, in principle, be reproducible by qualified individuals. Treasury guidelines call for clear documentation of data and methods used in producing estimates and projections. Some statistical publications are based on publicly available data, and the computer programs that produce the statistics can be made available on request; accordingly, information in those publications is fully reproducible by the public. In addition, some estimates and projections included in Customs information products are not directly

reproducible given ethical, feasibility, or confidentiality restraints. Others may not be directly reproducible because of the complexity and detail of the methods and data. In those cases, greater emphasis is placed on periodic review and on documentation of methods, assumptions, data sources, and related information. Information products that are deemed to have a greater impact on public policies are subject to more extensive internal review.

USE OF RELIABLE DATA SOURCES

Information products disseminated by Customs will be based on reliable, accurate data that have been validated. All data employed in the preparation of information products will be compiled using statistically sound procedures implemented by qualified professional staff. When analysis requires using samples from administrative data files, Customs employs statistically acceptable methods to design and select the samples. Data samples are designed and compiled by staff knowledgeable about the content, structure, and limitations of the administrative data files employed. In addition, those staff members maintain working relations with agency personnel who create, update, and maintain those files to ensure that their understanding of files is current and complete. When information products require administrative files linked to external data sources, Customs employs sound procedures for extracting and linking data from external sources based on a thorough understanding of the relevant components of the data sources.

PREPARATION OF STATISTICAL ESTIMATES

All estimation and sampling procedures will be prepared using statistically sound procedures designed by qualified professional staff. Samples are evaluated to ensure that the samples are representative. Specialists compare estimates with comparable information from prior years and from other sources to ensure reasonableness and reliability. Computer programs for sampling from files and using data from external data files are reviewed and tested by technical staff. Data files incorporating external data sources are reviewed to ensure that extraction and linkage processes have been implemented correctly.

Data sources, sampling errors, and disclosure limitation methods will be documented in publications, either for the publication as a whole or for individual tables. Documentation in Customs publications contains information on data sources including definitions and specifications of variables. Report documentation also includes, where appropriate, information on sampling errors and a description of rules or techniques for avoiding disclosure of confidential information.

PREPARATION OF SIMULATION MODELS

When Customs uses simulation models to estimate the effect policy and legislation have on government revenue the models are based on Customs best judgments of current and future behavioral relationships and methods of projecting key program outcomes. For all simulation

models, implementation procedures will be tested, and the models' performance will be thoroughly evaluated. All simulation models will be extensively tested and reviewed within Customs to verify that the computer programs that were developed to implement models conform to the stated objectives. Where appropriate, historical simulations will be developed to evaluate the success of a model in producing reasonable projections. Models will be periodically updated to reflect input from internal and external reviews and research findings on behavioral relationships.

PREPARATION OF ANALYTICAL REPORTS AND POLICY STUDIES

Analytical reports will be prepared by subject matter specialists who use sound statistical and analytic methods and are knowledgeable about the data sources and models being used. Staff, using a variety of analytical techniques ranging from simple tabulations and descriptive summary statistics to multivariate statistical methods and econometric models, prepare reports. Staff preparing analytical reports and policy studies will be experienced in their use of relevant data files, external data sources, and projections from simulation models.

Analytical techniques will be reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate for the data and the analysis to which they are applied, and they will be documented. Qualified staff will review all analytical reports and policy studies to ensure that the analysis is valid, complete, unbiased, objective, and relevant. When analyses are based on projections from simulation models, the assumptions used to produce the projections will be identified as well as the rationale for the assumptions used and the projected impact of using alternative assumptions.

EDITORIAL REVIEW FOR ACCURACY AND CLARITY OF INFORMATION IN PUBLICATIONS

All information products will be edited and proofread before release to ensure clarity and coherence of the final report. Text will be edited to ensure that the report is easy to read and grammatically correct thoughts and arguments flow logically, and information is worded concisely and lucidly. Tables and charts will be edited to ensure that they clearly and accurately illustrate and support points made in the text and include concise but descriptive titles. Tables and charts will indicate the unit of measure and the universe being examined, and all internal labels (column headings, row stubs, and panel headings) will accurately describe the information they contain. All changes made to a manuscript during the editing process will be checked by a proofreader, and reviewed and approved by the author and subject matter expert.

Integrity

Integrity, as used in the OMB quality guidelines, refers to the security of information from unauthorized access or revision to ensure that the information is not compromised through corruption or falsification.

To ensure the integrity of its information, Customs will employ rigorous controls that have been identified as representing sound security practices. Customs has in place programs and policies for securing its resources as required by the government information security laws. Those security procedures address all major components of information security and apply to all Customs operating components. In addition, Customs is subject to statutory requirements to protect the sensitive information it gathers and maintains on individuals. Those requirements are contained in the following documents:

- Privacy Act of 1974
- Computer Security Act of 1987
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars A-123, A-127, and A-130
- Government Information Security Reform Act

Procedure to Seek Correction of Information Under Section 515

BACKGROUND

In accordance with Section 515 of Public Law 106-554, codified at 44 U.S.C. § 3516, note, the United States Customs Service has developed a procedure to allow affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information Customs maintains and disseminates.

Overall, OMB does not envision that the administrative mechanisms for seeking correction of information would burden agencies with frivolous claims. Instead, the correction process would serve to address the genuine and valid needs of Customs and its constituents without disrupting agency processes. In making determinations of whether or not to correct information Customs may reject claims made in bad faith or without justification. Customs is required to undertake only the degree of correction that it concludes is appropriate for the nature and timeliness of the information involved and explain such practices in the annual fiscal year report to Treasury.

Under Treasury guidelines, this administrative procedure for seeking correction of information does not apply to agency dissemination of information that include a public comment process, such as notices of proposed rulemaking.

The burden of proof is on the party requesting correction of information to demonstrate that the information was in fact disseminated within the meaning of Section 515, OMB's Government-Wide Guidelines and the Treasury Guidelines, and warrants correction. It may not be in the public interest for Customs to devote significant resources to correct information where the expenditure of such resources is not, in Customs view, cost effective in light of the significance of the asserted error, the benefits that are likely to be derived from such a correction, the cost of the correction, and Customs more pressing priorities and obligations.

HOW TO SUBMIT REQUEST

Request for correction, and request for appeal, of information under Section 515 must be in writing and sent to Customs by postal mail or e-mail at the following address:

Mail: United States Customs Service
Office of Public Affairs
Information Quality Program
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Room 6.3D
Washington, DC 20229

Email: web.comments@customs.treas.gov

Request for correction of information must be submitted within a reasonable time, not to exceed one year from the initial data dissemination, or October 1, 2002, whichever is later. This may vary according to the frequency by which the data are disseminated and will be determined by Customs officials.

To seek a correction of information under Section 515, affected persons must:

- State that the request for correction of information is submitted under Section 515 of Public Law 106-554.
- Clearly describe the information that warrants correction.
- Include the name of the report or data product where the information is located, how it was disseminated, and the date of issuance.
- State how the data affected you and how correction would benefit you.

- State specifically how the information is in error and how it should be corrected. Provide supporting documentary evidence, such as comparable data or research results on the same topic, to help in the review of the request.
- State specifically why the information does not comply with OMB or Treasury Guidelines.
- Include requestor's name, mailing address, telephone number, and organizational affiliation, if any. (Optional - fax number and email address). Customs needs this information to respond to the request and contact affected persons, if required.

CUSTOMS RESPONSE

Based on a review of the information provided, Customs will:

- Determine whether a correction is warranted, and, if so, what action to take. The nature, influence, and timeliness of the information involved, the significance of the correction on the use of the information, and the magnitude of the correction will determine the level of review and any corrective action.
- Respond by letter, e-mail, or fax. The response will explain the findings of the review, and the actions Customs will take.
- Respond to a request for correction of information within 60 calendar days of receipt. If the request requires an extended period of time for processing, Customs will notify the requestor.

RIGHT TO APPEAL DECISION

If the request for correction of information is denied, the requestor will be informed of the right to an administrative appeal and told how to apply for it.

Appeals must be submitted to Customs within 45 calendar days of receipt of the denial letter.

An official independent of the initial denial will render final judgement of the appeal.

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

We are authorized to collect the information you provide in a request for correction of information under section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law No. 106-554 codified at 44 U.S.C. § 3516). It is needed to process your request and allow us to reply accordingly. You do not have to furnish the information, but

failure to do so may prevent your request from being processed. The information you furnish is rarely used for any purpose other than to process and respond to your request. However, we may disclose information you give us (e.g., to Congressional Office, or Department of Justice) if authorized or required by Federal law, such as the Privacy Act or the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Customs will keep official records on requests for correction of information beginning October 1, 2002, and retain statistics necessary for annual reports to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Systems/Chief Information Officer (DASIS/CIO).

Customs will prepare annual reports to the DASIS/CIO beginning November 1, 2003.