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Trade groups warn of Europe import delays amid new security measures

The European Union will implement its advance information import requirements on ocean freight entering or moving through Europe from June 3. Photo credit: Avigator Fortuner / Shutterstock.com.

Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe | May 16, 2024, 10:47 AM EDT

Global and European trade associations have issued an "urgent alert" to all businesses involved in moving goods by ocean into or through Europe to be ready for new import security measures that will be imposed from June 3.

The customs pre-arrival security and safety program, called Import Control System 2 (ICS2), is being implemented in three steps, starting with ocean and inland waterway carriers in June. It will be extended to forwarders filing house bills of lading in December, and then to road and rail shipments entering the EU from April 1, 2025. ICS2 will cover the European Union, Norway, Finland, Switzerland and Northern Ireland.

"Failure to comply with ICS2 requirements will result in delays and disruptions to exports to the EU from the rest of the world and to goods imported into the EU, and potentially ... fines and penalties for persons liable for submitting the Safety and Security data to ICS2," the eight trade bodies representing shippers, forwarders and vessel operators said in a joint statement Thursday.

The trade groups include the World Shipping Council, the International Federation of Freight Forwarders and the Global Shippers Forum.

While similar import rules have been in place in North America and Japan for several years, there are concerns that with just two weeks to go before ICS2 is rolled out in Europe, shippers and their forwarders might not be ready for the regulation. At the heart of the concerns is the scale of the advance cargo information required by ICS2, which will completely replace the previous ICS1 regulation.

"Some of most relevant changes compared to ICS1 are the implementation of house-level data filing and the EU Customs request on information about the buyer and seller of the cargo," Hapag-Lloyd told customers last month. "We can confirm that we will offer our customers' data logging on their behalf provided that all relevant data elements are shared with us in advance."

Extensive advance data required

ICS2 is an enhanced safety and security regime introduced jointly by customs authorities in the EU that requires specific details of imported goods to be provided before loading or arrival at the EU border. The extensive new data requirements include six-digit "Harmonized System" codes (HS codes) for each item in a consignment, an "acceptable description" and detailed buyer and seller information.

While European shippers and forwarders prepare for ICS2, across the English Channel the UK rolled out a post-Brexit import control system of its own on April 30. Customs officials are now checking goods at the border instead of at destination, as well as performing physical inspections on shipments of certain food, animal and plant goods, apart from those arriving from the Republic of Ireland.

Before April 30, only the highest-risk goods entering the UK from the EU were subject to checks, but the policy now extends to products deemed as medium risk. Among the checks are tests for pests and diseases that could impact the environment or food safety, which require visual inspections and temperature readings of goods.

The UK government estimates that with companies required to pay £29 per import category inspected, up to a maximum of £145 per consignment, the new import

controls will cost British firms approximately £330 million per year.

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