



Regulatory News Alerts & Updates

Regulatory Alert: U.S. Customs Highlights Importance of Precise Descriptions

April 17, 2024

Overview

On April 1, 2024, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued Cargo Systems Messaging Service (CSMS) message # 60011750 to the public regarding its intent to address vague merchandise descriptions. CBP reminded the trade that precise, or specific, descriptions of the cargo being shipped are required by various CBP regulations; including for express consignments as specified in 19 CFR 128.21(a)(4).

Descriptions such as “gifts”, “parts”, or “accessories” do not provide the required clarity for CBP’s purposes. Among other consequences, these types of descriptions can result in unnecessary delays while clarifying details are requested. A list of precise description examples as well as unacceptable cargo descriptions can be found on the CBP website in the References section.

Precise descriptions accurately describe what the goods are made of and their intended use. Examples include “children’s toys made of plastic” rather than “toys” and “women’s dresses made of 60% cotton 40% polyester” rather than “clothing”.

FedEx customers are encouraged to review this CSMS message and an update to the message (CSMS Message # 60144714) and are reminded of the importance of providing precise cargo descriptions when creating their shipments with FedEx to ensure their shipments comply with CBP’s regulations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q 1 - What does CBP mean by a “precise cargo description”?

A 1 - While CBP is referencing a specific regulatory requirement for U.S. imports, CBP has also provided over 100 comparisons of poor descriptions and precise descriptions to help illustrate to the trade how to create a precise cargo description. Those examples can be found on the CBP e-commerce landing page in the final link of the References section below.

Q 2 - What if I am shipping multiple items at once? Can I simply provide a summary of the items?

A 2 - The description(s) provided must properly describe the contents of the shipment. On the commercial invoice, each separate product must be identified and broken out onto its own line that distinguishes that product's value, quantity, and weight to provide customs agencies with required visibility to the transaction.

References

CBP CSMS Message #60011750

https://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/USDHSCBP-393b4e6?wgt_ref=USDHSCBP_WIDGET_2

CBP Regulation 19 CFR 128.21(a)(4)

[https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-19/part-128#p-128.21\(a\)\(4\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-19/part-128#p-128.21(a)(4))

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Precise Description Examples

<https://www.cbp.gov/trade/basic-import-export/e-commerce>

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