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The NAFTA Center: American and Mexican Customs Experts Providing Informational Services to Businesses and the General Public

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The NAFTA Center: American and Mexican Customs Experts Providing Informational Services to Businesses and the General Public

Attorneys and businesspersons seeking to maximize the benefits provided under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) often have questions regarding appropriate customs procedures. Because of the complexity of the trade agreement, difficulties in logistic planning and ensuring compliance with the intricacies of the law can prevent the full realization of the benefits available. These problems are particularly important during the tariff phaseout period under the NAFTA.¹ To help interested parties comply with the NAFTA, the Customs Services of Canada, Mexico and the United States have established the NAFTA Center at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport in Texas.

One method of increasing understanding of the NAFTA is to provide answers to frequently asked questions about customs compliance under the Agreement. The NAFTA Center accomplishes this task by using a SpectraFAX computerized information center which can provide information on a variety of questions. To use the SpectraFAX service, Canadian and U.S. residents may call 1-800-829-1906 (Mexican residents should use 91-800-829-1906) and follow a touch-tone menu.

Information available through this service includes instruction and appendices for completing Certificates of Origin, the Tri-Lateral Guide to Customs Documents, Customs Directives, judicial review documents, and border crossing hours. A list of available documents is also available through the SpectraFAX service. In the near future, the system will be expanded to include hours and special procedures for seaports and airports located in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The Center also assists with questions relating to the completion of Certificates of Origin under the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States, Annotated.² Properly completed Certificates of Origin are essential in determining the applicable tariff, thereby maximizing the benefits realized under the NAFTA. However, while the Center can assist producers in complying with the system, it cannot give binding decisions.

In order to efficiently and effectively serve the general public, the Center prefers to disseminate information via the SpectraFAX system. However, the Center's expert staff is available for telephone consultation. The Center is presently composed of one representative from Mexico, Mr. Armando F. Beteta, Representative for NAFTA and Customs Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, and one representative from the United States, Ms. Cathy Saucedo, Supervisory NAFTA Trade Analyst, United States Customs Service.

The Center currently receives approximately 250 requests for information per week.

1. See generally, 60 Fed. Reg. 46,334 (Sept. 6, 1995).
 2. 19 U.S.C. section 1202; 19 C.F.R. section 152.11. See NAFTA Article 401. The Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) is a standardized system of customs descriptions and tariff information, including proper descriptions, a standardized codification system, marking requirements, and appropriate units of quantity. Further information on HTS is available through the SpectraFAX service by requesting Documents 0536 (Canada), 0569 (Mexico) and 0126 (United States).
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Generally, the staff can provide points of contact for questions they cannot answer directly, such as investment information, transportation information and visa requirements. However, the Center cannot provide statistical or predictive data.

Another important service provided by the NAFTA Center is the presentation of training seminars on NAFTA customs procedures. There is no charge for this service, provided the party requesting the seminar pays for the instructors' travel expenses. Optimum group sizes are 30-50, and the Center requires a written request describing the group and the information requested.

The combination of informational services provided by the NAFTA Center are invaluable to parties interested in benefiting from the NAFTA. Information and answers to complex questions arising from the Agreement are readily available as are personal training seminars. Because of the availability of these services, the NAFTA Center is well-suited to meet the important task of educating and assisting producers so that they can realize the potential economic benefits of the NAFTA.

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Student Editorial Board
