

TRADEBEAT

International Liaison Unit

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WCO Response to Coronavirus

The impact of the Coronavirus Covid-19 has undoubtedly been etched in the minds of all citizens across the globe, as a defining event which has tested our vulnerability as a species. With devastating effects on human life, COVID-19 has stretched its grip across the global supply chain, placing a chokehold on the demand and supply network of certain commodities that have proven vital to our survival in this era of globalization.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has negatively affected our borders; severely impacting various modes of transport used by both people and goods for travel and trade. The effective management of the global supply chain becomes an even greater priority for Customs at this time where additional challenges are presented in navigating this global pandemic, while at the same time ensuring border security and trade continuity. The World Customs Organization (WCO) has taken a very consultative approach in tackling the COVID-19 crisis and has invited the heads of its 183 Members to avail their experiences, challenges, measures and advice. Focusing on the measures, the global Customs community has been asked to contemplate and respond to 3 main issues:

- How is the movement of goods being facilitated while applying appropriate risk management ?
- How are communication, collaboration and cooperation with partners such as government agencies and the private sector being enhanced ?
- What are the measures being taken to protect Customs officers?

“From Customs point of view, we want to prevent and fight the spread of COVID-19 on the one hand, but, on the other, we want to safeguard supply chain continuity.”



- Kunio Mikuriya,
Secretary General,
World Customs Organization

WCO Facilitation of Relief Goods



The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and was declared as such by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 30 January 2020. By 11 March 2020 the WHO characterized the novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a pandemic.

As the world confronted this global challenge, there was an expectation that the demand for medicines, medical supplies and medical equipment would increase dramatically in the immediate term, creating the need for the facilitation of relief goods in all impacted countries. In its 2020 Updated WHO Recommendations for International Traffic in Relation to the COVID-19 Outbreak, it was noted that restrictions to travel and trade would undoubtedly have far reaching effects on businesses. It was also revealed that much needed aid and technical support could be interrupted, which could have negative social and economic effects on countries. Customs administrations were therefore urged to continue to facilitate not only relief goods, but also goods that were needed in general to help minimize the overall impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on economies and societies.

As a first measure, priority was given to the identification of relief goods through the form of a reference guide. Like goods for any other natural disaster, relief goods associated with COVID-19 were referenced and prioritized by the WCO which called on its Members to implement relief strategies for such goods. Not only were countries encouraged to facilitate the trade of relief goods, but fiscal policies, where practicable, should be undertaken to relieve the burden of duties and taxes typically levied on these goods.

The COVID-19 HS classification reference is made available to all Customs administrations, enabling easy identification of these relief products through their Harmonised System (HS) classification. Customs administrations are strongly urged by the WCO to establish a coordinated and proactive approach, to ensure that integrity and continued facilitation of the global supply chain is maintained by all concerned agencies. On 2 June 2020, based on a joint effort between the WCO and the WHO, the 3rd edition of the HS Classification Reference for COVID-19 Medical Supplies was made available. The Reference does not have legal status, but provides an indicative list for users, and as such, traders should be guided by domestic classification protocols.

A reference for HS classification for Covid-19 medical supplies was created by the WCO and made available for adoption by Members for relief goods.

HS Classification Reference for Covid-19 Medical Supplies 3.0 Edition

- **Section I - COVID-19 Test kits/ Instruments and apparatus used in Diagnostic Test**
(E.g. COVID 19 test kits such as Diagnostic reagents based on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nucleic acid test classified under HS 3822.00)
- **Section II - Protective garments and the like**
(E.g. Textile face-masks, without a replaceable filter or mechanical parts, including surgical masks and disposable face-masks made of non-woven textiles. This includes the masks known as N95 Particulate Respirators. Note: the heading also includes N95 respirators with simple exhalation valves as these remain respirator masks and are not gas masks classified under HS 6307.90.)
- **Section III – Disinfectants and Sterilisation products**
(E.g. Alcohol solution such as undenatured, containing by volume 80% or more ethyl alcohol classified under HS 2207.10)
- **Section IV – Oxygen Therapy Equipment and Pulse Oximeters**
(E.g. Oxygen delivery devices to supply oxygen from the device to the patient such as oxygen masks classified under HS 9019.20)
- **Section V - Other Medical Devices and Equipment**
(E.g. Intubation kits such as reusable intubation kits classified under HS 9018.90)
- **Section VI - Other Medical Consumables**
(E.g. Soap such as bar form (including medicated bars of soap for toilet use) classified under HS 3401.11)
- **Section VII – Vehicles**
(E.g. Mobile clinics vehicles such as mobile clinics (medical) with operating theatre, anaesthetic equipment and other surgical apparatus classified under HS 8705.90)
- **Section VIII - Other**
(E.g. Empty medical gas cylinders, portable, for oxygen, fitted with a valve and a pressure and flow regulator such as steel or steel alloy classified under HS 7311.00)



JCA's Response to COVID-19

On 10 March 2020, Jamaica confirmed its first imported case of COVID-19. Measures were immediately taken by the country's Ministry of Health and Wellness to minimize the risk of community spread and increase the already imposed travel restrictions to Jamaica. At the same time, public gatherings were discouraged; non-essential travel was discouraged; patrol of irregular border crossings were ongoing; sensitization of key personnel at all air and sea ports continued; quarantine facilities were designated and isolation facilities in public hospitals were retrofitted. Additionally, a COVID-19 Response Advisory team was established and the public was urged to adhere to infection prevention and control measures. As the spread of the virus increased, more stringent measures were undertaken resulting in a more complete restriction on personnel travel, while trade in goods continued. Essential to the continuity of the global supply chain, cargo traffic was not restricted. However, the JCA implemented the relevant health measures and protocols in keeping with the Government of Jamaica's national response strategy, in prioritizing the wellbeing of its employees as well as its stakeholders. As such, increased efforts were geared towards information sharing across various platforms and sanitation supplies were individualized for the benefit of the staff. These measures were bolstered by regular safety updates and the assurance of contingency measures to combat COVID-19 and to ensure seamless trade continuity.

The JCA advanced its implementation of trade facilitation measures by increasing the efficiency and capacity of electronic services. Functionalities in customs operations are being facilitated electronically and stakeholder's cooperation is being enhanced for seamless service delivery. Telecommuting has become a feature in JCA's service delivery and semi-automated and manual processes are being fully automated under the Jamaica Single Window for Trade (JSWIFT) project. An Express Clearance Process was launched for personal shipments and imports falling below a certain threshold value, coupled with the simplification of export clearance procedures. As the nation attempts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, the JCA has balanced face to face contact with stakeholder needs, forging the way forward and adapting to the new norm created by this global crisis. Accelerating the digital environment within the customs context now becomes critical in advancing the vision of a modern customs administration. The JCA has made tremendous strides in creating such an environment with the relevant border regulatory agencies (BRAs) in guaranteeing this vision through paperless inspections and systems integration.

"As a border protection entity, we are fully aware of our importance in facilitating trade and travel, which is crucial for the sustainability of the economy and the livelihood of our people, and likewise, we recognise our vulnerability to this virus."



**- Velma Ricketts-Walker
CEO/Commissioner,
Jamaica Customs Agency**

"As we recalibrate and adjust to the new norm, we must not let down our guard, or relent from this fight. This is a fight that we must win. Let us do it for our families, our communities, our organizations and, for Jamaica. Let us together, rise stronger."

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic only strengthens the JCA resolve to implement more Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based procedures and continues to utilize them in enhancing customs operations.

WCO Coronavirus Webpage

A special webpage on the Coronavirus has been created within the WCO website, for the specific purpose of information sharing on a global scale for the benefit of Members and their stakeholders. Designed to compile information about WCO instruments, tools, initiatives and databases, the Coronavirus Webpage seeks to address Covid-19 related challenges being faced not only by Members but by the general public. The website is accessible to all and is designed to advise or highlight the best practices most suited to navigate this pandemic.

Based on an assessment of prevailing global circumstances, the WCO seeks to keep Members abreast of important events such as *“proposed working arrangements for WCO meetings affected by COVID 19.”* Several face to face engagements have been cancelled or postponed, and where practical, have been facilitated via electronic platforms. Recognizing that effective communication is an essential element of crisis management, the WCO has formulated *“The COVID-19 Crisis: WCO Guidance on how to communicate during a crisis.”* The purpose of the document is to provide Customs administrations with step by step guidance of managing and defining an effective communication strategy during this time of heightened public concern. Proactive communication supports the adoption of protective measures, which reduces confusion and fosters better use of resources. For instance, the communication guide outlines measures to be taken if a staff member contracts the COVID-19 virus, and how this event should be managed and communicated. Congruently, the guide provides strategies on how to prepare to rebuild, by strategizing the post-crisis communication process and re-establish trust among staff and stakeholders to confidently function within the office space.

In its bid to unite Members through technology despite divisive borders, the 135th/136th Sessions of the WCO Council was virtually held on 25 June 2020. This year’s annual Council sessions followed a document-based approach with the online consultations focusing on discussions about urgent matters derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The decisions taken by the WCO Council such as the approval of the Finance Committee’s Budgetary recommendations and the adoption of the corrigendum amendments of the 2022 version of the Harmonized System demonstrates the resilience and relevance of continuity during this crisis and places the WCO back on track to strengthen and secure the global supply chain through multilateral support.



Recovery Mode

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the eyes of the world to open up to the impact of yet another shock to the global supply chain resulting in large scale disruption. From terrorist attacks, to trade wars to protectionist policies, the global supply chain remains susceptible to external shocks but has also demonstrated that crisis mitigation policies can facilitate faster recovery for entities. Going forward, such strategies should be prioritized by both the private and

public sector to foster economic stability on the economy in times of crisis. Another key element in the way forward is for entities to develop a strong digital infrastructure through investment in technology to achieve sustainability. Entities with a stronger digital footprint are more resilient to supply chain disruption and could seamlessly function within the remote working environment.

ILU TRADEBEAT

The International and Industry Liaison Unit is committed to raising the level of awareness on topics relating to International Trade, as well as issues concerning the Caribbean region which may affect both our internal and external stakeholders. Our quarterly newsletter seeks to highlight global trade topics and their importance to Customs Administrations worldwide, specifically how they affect the Jamaica Customs Agency. As we realize our vision of becoming a modern Customs administration delivering excellent service, we recognize the importance of knowledge transfer in delivering our objectives and use this forum as one way of contributing to the vision of the JCA. The International and Industry Liaison Unit is located at the JCA's Head Office, and our officers are available to respond to your trade-related queries.

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