



Compliance with Firearms and Ammunition Import Laws will Improve with ACE



The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is the only federal agency that processes applications to permanently import firearms, ammunition and implements of war into the United States. ATF has licensed approximately 800 entities to permanently import firearms, ammunition and implements of war into the United States. In 2008, ATF's Firearms and Explosives Imports Branch received in excess of 9,000 applications for the permanent importation of defense articles.

Applications to import are currently submitted by mail or by an electronic interface available to commercial importers at ATF's website. Most importers continue to use the paper-based system because of technical limitations to data that can be transmitted via the ATF web application. Some applications include hundreds of descriptive line items that must be entered onto continuation pages of paper applications or keyed into the electronic version by applicants. Once an application is approved, it is mailed in hard copy back to the applicant, who must include it with the entry paperwork filed with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The importer then must re-key the line items of authorized articles onto an ATF import release form so that CBP can certify the release to ATF and mail a hard copy of the release form back to ATF. The entire process can take many weeks to complete, even for the small percentage of applications submitted to ATF electronically.

ATF hopes to develop and implement an interface with ACE that will reduce the dependency on paper documentation. Through this interface, the trade would file for CBP release electronically.

CBP would have direct access to the ATF system to verify that the goods sought for release were approved for importation by ATF. Once CBP authorized release, its certified copy of the release documentation could be electronically submitted to ATF. Functionality improvements for the trade would include the ability to electronically submit attachments with the import permit applications and release documents. ATF anticipates that the trade would be able to greatly reduce the amount of time it takes to file permit applications and clear entries.

Additional benefits ATF expects to see from its participation in ACE/ITDS include:

- ❖ **Improved access to statistical data** – Through ACE, ATF will have the means to extract data to perform more complete, timely and accurate trend analysis and market condition assessments
- ❖ **Improved data quality** – Electronic filing, specifically of the CBP-certified import release form, and data edit validations will improve accuracy and timeliness of international trade data collected and made available to ATF intelligence offices for further processing and analysis
- ❖ **Elimination of intensive manual processes** – ATF's system will be designed to extract and manipulate large data sets available from ACE which will reduce or eliminate the need to manually enter data from paper into ATF databases. This reduction will not only speed the overall process but significantly reduce data entry costs.

CBP and ATF officials have worked closely over the past five years to define requirements and to develop a system that will streamline the import process while enhancing compliance with the import laws and regulations that both agencies are charged with enforcing.

Many branches within ATF currently utilize the ACE Portal for a variety of compliance and intelligence functions. One of the duties of an ATF Industry Operations Investigator (IOI) is to ensure that ATF licensed importers are in compliance with Federal laws and regulations governing conduct of business and recordkeeping. Traditionally, ATF IOIs have not had real-time access to import information because ATF received only weekly data dumps from CBP's Automated Commercial System. Now, with enhanced Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) functionality deployed to ATF field offices, IOIs will have direct access to the system and can obtain detailed, real-time import information in support of the regulatory inspection process and other investigative operations.