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No major issues on first day of US Customs ACE rollout

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WASHINGTON — The first of many deadlines in the rollout of [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#) (<http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations>)'s ACE "single window" initiative came and went Thursday without any major hiccups.

There were some minor challenges for those filing in the [single window automated commercial environment, or ACE, system](#) (http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-chief-single-window-still-agency%E2%80%99s-top-priority_20150601.html), which now stands three years behind schedule and more than \$1 billion over budget. The single window system promises to streamline border processing, allowing importers and exporters to more easily share trade documents with government agencies, saving shippers and brokers time and money.

"My sense is that companies' problems are diffuse: Generally, the system is just slow, the help desk wait times are long," Marianne Rowden, president and CEO of the American Association of Exporters and Importers, told JOC.com Thursday.

Those required to file in ACE as of Thursday were being told to contact their client representative if they are facing any difficulties or challenges and, in some cases, were being allowed to use what will soon be a legacy program, the Automated Commercial System or ACS.

But, by and large, Thursday's rollout went off without a hitch, said Fany Flores-Pastor, director for research development at global logistics software developer [Descartes Systems](#) (<http://www.joc.com/international-logistics/logistics-technology/descartes>).

"The day hasn't ended, but we haven't heard of major issues," Flores-Pastor told JOC.com. "If we had this [back in](#)

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[February \(http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-delays-full-rollout-ace-%E2%80%98staggered-approach%E2%80%99-20160208.html\)](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-delays-full-rollout-ace-%E2%80%98staggered-approach%E2%80%99-20160208.html), that would have been really bad.”

Thursday was the twice-revised deadline for filing electronic entries in ACE for certain partner government agencies, such as those who file with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for the Lacey Act and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Filers with no corresponding PGAs were also given extensions.

Customs had originally scheduled full implementation for all filers for Nov. 1, but after many said they simply weren't ready for the new system, [implementation was delayed \(http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-extends-ace-single-window-deadline-20150831.html\)](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-extends-ace-single-window-deadline-20150831.html) to Feb. 28. Then, in early February, still facing the same litany of complaints and concerns, Customs announced that it would be taking “a staggered approach” to the rollout of its ACE initiative.

Other filers that did not begin using ACE Thursday will come online May 28 while others will begin filing on still-undecided dates later this summer.

“This staggered ACE deadline approach has benefitted trade so far,” said Flores-Pastor. The November or February rollouts could have been devastating to trade, she said.

For now, those shippers scheduled to begin filing May 28 still have access to both ACE and ACS.

Flores-Pastor said Thursday's deadline, however, was the least of her concerns after the announcement of the “staggered approach.”

“It is like a little concerning that there are going to be many many more PGAs coming in the summer,” Flores-Pastor said. “Are we going to be OK?”

As of Thursday, the answer to that question was still uncertain.

Customs was not immediately available for comment Thursday.

Throughout the summer, the agency plans to bring a slew of other groups on board, including the Agricultural Marketing Service; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives; the Centers for Disease Control; the Defense Contract Management Agency; the Directorate of Defense Trade Controls; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Enforcement and Compliance Commission; the Environmental Protection Agency; the Fish and Wildlife Service; the Food Safety and Inspection Service; the National Marine Fisheries Service; and the Alcohol and Tobacco, Tax and Tariff Bureau.

Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration, one of the largest PGAs involved, and one that by many accounts has struggled the most with the ongoing transition, has been removed from the calendar altogether.

“This summer is when everything — reconciliation, drawback, statement processing — will be migrating into ACE. Come May 28, no more ACS,” Flores-Pastor said. “That's where the panic will be.”

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