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US Customs can't guarantee ACE won't have more 'stumbles'

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WASHINGTON — [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations) (<http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations>) says that while it is safeguarding against a redux of the “fumbled” initial rollout of its new electronic filing system, it cannot “100-percent guarantee” users won’t face the same glitches and network errors when the remainder of system filers are onboarded later this summer.

“I’m hoping we will never see an issue again, but I can’t 100-percent guarantee that,” Bill Delansky, director and product owner at Customs’ ACE Business Office told callers on a teleconference Friday hosted by the Airforwarders Association.

Delansky said the initial rollout of the Customs’ “single window” portal, known as the [Automated Commercial Environment](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) (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), or ACE, was “fumbled” due to a “configuration setting” issue in the legacy system that was not caught during initial testing.

March 31 was the deadline for those who file with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for the Lacey Act and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, as well as those with no corresponding partner government agency, or PGA.

In its [first five days of use](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs%E2%80%99-ace-woes-%E2%80%98jeopardizing-shipments%E2%80%99_20160404.html) (http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs%E2%80%99-ace-woes-%E2%80%98jeopardizing-shipments%E2%80%99_20160404.html), though, the system — meant to streamline border processing and allow shippers to easily share trade documents with government agencies, saving time and money — was fraught with slow load times, network errors, system-wide crashes and long wait times for the Customs’ help desk.

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"The system was up, but it was obviously so slow it was ineffectual for users," Delansky said Friday. "It sounds like we should have caught that, but ... it wasn't apparent on the initial loading and testing. It was difficult to investigate it."

Delansky said his agency, however, added CPUs and servers, revving up the system's horsepower, eventually [resolving all of the glitches](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-says-resolving-all-of-the-glitches) (<http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-says-resolving-all-of-the-glitches> [20160405.html](http://www.joc.com/regulation-policy/customs-regulations/us-customs-regulations/us-customs-says-resolving-all-of-the-glitches)) that were revealed during ACE's first five days of mandatory use. Slow load times when U.S. West Coast filers begin to use the portal each day, a common complaint among users on the call Friday, have also been resolved, he said.

March 31, however, was just one of two major deadlines for the initiative.

Come May 28, no less than a dozen additional PGAs will be required to file and have their corresponding shippers file in the new portal. Callers Friday said they still have significant concerns about if the system will be able to handle that wave of new users as they are onboarded.

And Delansky was offering no ironclad guarantee that the system wouldn't face similar challenges on May 28.

"When you have a large system like ACE, unfortunately I can't guarantee that won't happen," he said.

On May 28, a dozen PGAs will be required to file and have their corresponding shippers file in the new ACE portal. That includes 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.

According to Customs, 64 percent of cargo release and entries and 89 percent of entry summaries are already filed in ACE.

Some in the industry have said they remain confident that by the time of the May 28 deadline many filers who are not required to file via ACE will already be using the system, and those who come online that day will still have an easier go of it than what was seen and experienced March 31.

"The pure numbers say that if you only add another 32 percent then you are not going to see what we saw last week," Adam Hill, vice president of operations at freight forwarder and customs broker Scarborough International, told JOC.com Tuesday.

But for others, 32 percent is still an unnerving number considering the trouble that Customs has had bringing just two PGAs online during its initial rollout.

"It is a little concerning that there are going to be many many more PGAs coming in the summer," Fany Flores-Pastor, director for research development at global logistics software developer [Descartes Systems](http://www.joc.com/international-logistics/logistics-technology/descartes) (<http://www.joc.com/international-logistics/logistics-technology/descartes>), told JOC.com the day of the rollout. "Are we going to be OK?"

Contact Reynolds Hutchins at reynolds.hutchins@jhs.com (<mailto:reynolds.hutchins@jhs.com>) and follow him on Twitter: [@Hutchins_JOC](https://twitter.com/hutchins_joc) (https://twitter.com/hutchins_joc).

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