



THE SINGLE WINDOW CONCEPT

THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION'S PERSPECTIVE

A reference to the Single Window Concept has been made in several of the country proposals to the World Trade Organization during the current negotiations on trade facilitation. It would appear that there is not a common understanding of this concept. The purpose of this paper is to outline context in which the WCO uses the term.

The Members of the WCO and the WCO Secretariat as well as industry, and various governmental and international organizations devoted a significant amount of time and resources in developing the single window concept.

The most commonly applied definition of the term Single Window is the following:

A single window is defined as a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit related-related regulatory requirements.(1)

The single window is clearly a trade facilitative measure. It permits the trader or transporter to submit all the data needed for determining admissibility of the goods in a standardized format only once to the authorities involved in border controls and at a single portal. (2) The Single Window concept places the onus on the authorities to manage the Single Window and to ensure that the participating authorities or agencies are either given access to the information or are actually given the information by the managing authority. It eliminates the need for the trader or transporter to submit the same data to several different border authorities or agencies.

Implementation of a Single Window does not necessarily imply the implementation and use of high-tech information and communication technology. The Single Window concept can be implemented in a manual environment with the co-operation of all border authorities. However, countries may enjoy fuller benefits of a Single Window by using ICT and dataset standards commonly accepted by the relevant public and private stakeholders. In particular, the use of internationally accepted standards, such as, Harmonized System of Commodity Description and Coding, the WCO Data Model and the Unique Consignment Reference is important. Agencies involved in Integrated Border Management should determine the essential amount of data necessary to effect their controls.

If examination of the goods is necessary, the co-ordination of physical inspection amongst the relevant agencies adds significantly to the value to of the Single Window.

(1) See, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Recommendation on Establishing a Single Window (Recommendation 33, ECE/TRADE/352).
http://www.unece.org/cefact/recommendations/rec33/rec33_ecetrd352_e.pdf.

(2) The data may come from more than one source. See the WCO's Integrated Supply Chain Management Guidelines.