



## **Customs and Border Protection enhances international cooperation on supply chain security**

### **CBP's Executive Director for Cargo and Conveyance Security, Thomas Overacker, joined Federal Drive with Tom Temin**

**Tom Temin:** This is the Federal News Network Podcasts. Nearly every agency is involved in supply chain security in one way or another. Now, Customs and Border Protection has expanded a cooperative agreement it's had for years with an organization called the World Business Alliance for Secure Commerce Organization, here with more on the agreement and what they actually do.

CBP's Executive Director for Cargo and Conveyance Security, Thomas Overacker. Mr. Overacker good to have you on.

**Thomas Overacker:** Good morning, Tom. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Tom Temin:** This organization, first of all, who is this? This is shippers basically?

**Thomas Overacker:** Well, the Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, is a nonprofit private organization based primarily in Latin America that has members in over 11 countries, 25 chapters, nearly 3,500 businesses, which would include freight forwarders, shippers, importers, exporters, businesses, they've formed an Alliance where they promote best practices for supply chain security.

**Tom Temin:** Got it. So, these people could be sending material to the United States in any number of modes, I guess they could fly it in, ship it in containers that could come over rail, I guess if it's South America, correct?

**Thomas Overacker:** Well, yes, and actually I think the best way to look at this is that American importers, those businesses located here in the United States who engage in international trade, they have partners that are part of their supply chain. And so, these are businesses that they would want to have a comfort level, knowing that they have appropriate supply chain security practices to prevent risks such as contraband, narcotics, or any other sort of undesirable incoming shipment from infiltrating their supply chains. So, what comes into the United States, we basically have the confidence that those goods coming into the United States are safe and secure.

**Tom Temin:** That means that they have done some pre-work before the shipment would head here. In other words...

**Thomas Overacker:** Exactly. At CBP, we have a program called the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism. We've launched it in November of 2001, after the tragic events of September 11th. The purpose of that program was basically to establish supply chain best practices to prevent terrorist weapons or weapons of mass destruction from entering the United States. But it also has utility in supply chain in general, to ensure that goods are safe and secure. And that nefarious actors, whether it's drug trafficking organizations or other transnational criminal organizations are not infiltrating supply chains globally.



And so, what we see the Business Alliance for Secure Commerce as a partner to our Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism for us to have a force multiplier, if you will, of establishing best practices globally, but ensuring that all of our members within the CTPAT program also have knowledge of other partners implementing secure practices around the globe.

**Tom Temin:** And now, you have expanded or enhanced the cooperative agreement that you've had with this organization. Let's call it the WBO for short for many years. What's new now?

**Thomas Overacker:** Well, I think before we get into what's new, I think it's important to understand what we've done in the past. And really this relationship goes back to 1996, when then the United States Customs Service, you know, established the Business Anti-Smuggling Coalition with the private sector throughout Latin America. It was that sort of impetus that has helped us promote common practices for supply chain security. But then, as we got into the 2000's, when we created the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism or CTPAT, we continued to work with the BASC or the Business Alliance for Secure Commerce.

Is there now known and aligning our standards with their standards, so that we have confidence that what they do when they certify their members as being compliant, that we have a high degree of confidence that they are truly compliant with the best and the most appropriate and up-to-date supply chain standards. And then in 2012, we entered into a joint agreement with them to continue to promote that relationship. But what we've done most recently, the agreement that we signed last month was a new action plan that has nine specific items to it.

And this is unique in the sense that we never had such an action plan with a private organization before, but it certainly aligns with our approach to supply chain security, where we see the necessity of having a public private partnership.

**Tom Temin:** We're speaking with Thomas Overacker, our Executive Director for Cargo and Conveyance Security at Customs and Border Protection. Tell us more what's in the new agreement, the new plan.

**Thomas Overacker:** With this new action plan and the nine items in it, we've identified basically four areas of collaboration and cooperation that we will pursue. One of those is engagement with the BASC and their members on such topics as maritime security and supply chain security to continue to promote best practices. Another part of the plan is that we will give recognition to those members of WBO from the CTPAT program's perspective, so that the members of the CTPAT program will know who the BASC members are.

Therefore, when they engage in trade in Latin America, they can seek out business partners who are secure. And that's a big part of it. Another part of it is information sharing. One of the things that we try to promote within the CTPAT program is sharing information with our partners about risks and identifying problem areas and needs for improvement.



But this information sharing agreement now expands to the 3,500 members of BASC so that we can really leverage what they know and what they see on the ground, in this part of the world. And we can apply that to our standards here in the United States. And then the last thing that will be part of this new action plan is training. And so, we will engage with members of BASC and our own CTPAT membership to promote training of best practices, including the implementation of our new minimum-security criteria for membership in the CTPAT program.

**Tom Temin:** Got it. It's almost like the good housekeeping seal of approval for shipments. In many ways...

**Thomas Overacker:** It is. That's a very good analogy.

**Tom Temin:** And since 1996, I imagine this whole idea of securing shipments and having confidence in them has gotten much more technologically intensive with barcodes and, radio frequency ID tags, etc.

**Thomas Overacker:** Well, yes, technology has gone a long way to helping us secure supply chains, whether it's technology for containers or just technology for tracking cargo shipments, as they move also just the use of advanced electronic data, so that we know what cargo was coming as soon as possible in the supply chain, and in that way, we can apply all that information to our risk assessments so that when cargo does arrive in the United States, we can segment out the low risk cargo and as a result, we can expertly facilitate legitimate trade.

But at the same time, we can focus on those areas of concern, where we see potential risks and give those cargo shipments, they're necessary, due diligence, as with respect to scrutiny, whether it's the non-intrusive inspection or a physical examination or other techniques that we would use to make sure that the cargo is secure and that there's no compromise to the supply chain and that contraband is not present.

**Tom Temin:** Sure. And just for those of us that are not versed personally, in the fine points of shipping, if a shipping container ship comes to the United States, and they may have 5, 10, I guess, even as many as 20,000 containers, aboard, it's not coming as a pig in a poke. There's a manifest for that ship, that arrives ahead of time, so that you know where to begin the inspections and know what might be sensitive.

**Thomas Overacker:** Absolutely. And this goes back to the trade act of 2002, when we promulgated new regulations requiring what we call Advanced Electronic Data and different actors in the supply chain have different responsibilities. With respect to maritime cargo, the vessel operators and the shippers have to transmit to us the manifest for those goods that are coming to the United States, 24 hours prior to loading on the vessel at the form port of departure. In addition to that, we have additional requirements from the importer of those goods to give us a security filing, 24 hours prior to loading as well.

And then we use that information to conduct a risk assessment. And we also have a layered approach to supply chain security in the sense that we've pushed our borders out, if you will. We have something called the container security initiative where we have CBP officers at seaports around the globe in strategic locations, where we have the opportunity to work with host governments.



So, if we find something that we think is high risk, we can address that risk at the foreign port of lading, rather than at the CBP port of arrival, but even so, when the cargo does arrive in our ports, we apply all of this information to our risk assessment. And then we focus on those containers, which are at the most high risk. So, as you can see, there are multiple actors in the supply chain to have responsibilities, whether it's the vessel operators, the non-vessel operating common carriers, or the importers, or the custom house brokers, that file paperwork on behalf of importers.

Everybody has a role to play in the supply chain and all of them contribute to the supply chain security regime that we've established at CBP.

**Tom Temin:** And of course, you're based in Washington. Do you ever just, in normal times, hop on a plane and maybe go out to Los Angeles or to Fort Lauderdale to just watch the operation, because it's an amazing choreography when this kind of activity is going on.

**Thomas Overacker:** A seaport operation is an amazing piece of choreography just as you described. And we've seen around the globe where the use of autonomous carriers and autonomous trucks to move containers and autonomous cranes that basically can take containers off of a large container vessel and move them throughout a container yard, placed them on rail cars or truck chasses to move around the country. It's really quite an amazing thing to see. And yes, I do travel quite a lot.

I traveled to see ports throughout the United States and globally, and I can tell you, I never get tired of seeing that. It's really fascinating just to see how global commerce moves and how, what gets on the shelves of the stores, where we shop or nowadays when we're shopping online, those products that we select online to have delivered straight to our house, how they get to the United States, quite a fascinating process.

**Tom Temin:** And do you think we'll ever have a nicer tunnel? That's taller out of Baltimore?

**Thomas Overacker:** I can't speak for that, but I understand. I understand.

**Tom Temin:** All right, Thomas Overacker is Executive Director for Cargo Conveyance Security at Customs and Border Protection.

**Thomas Overacker:** Thanks so much for joining me, Tom.

**Tom Temin:** It was my pleasure. We'll post this interview along with the link to more [information@federalnewsnetwork.com/federaldrive](https://www.federalnewsnetwork.com/federaldrive) [here](#), the Federal Drive on demand, subscribe at [apple podcast](#) or wherever you get your shows.