

Pre-Arrival Process System (PAPS)

Understanding the Canadian Cross-Border Clearance Process

The Pre-Arrival Processing System (PAPS) is administered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as a way to expedite the border clearance process for commercial shipments. PAPS relies on bar-code technology and advance notification about incoming shipments. Through PAPS, low-risk shipments are able to arrive at the U.S. border precleared for entry. This has the dual effect of reducing a carrier's wait time and easing congestion at U.S. border crossings.

The Trade Act of 2002 mandated the advance electronic transmission of information about all cargo shipments entering and leaving the United States. Different systems were developed to address each mode of transportation. PAPS was approved as the interchange to be used for all shipments arriving via truck at the U.S. border.

How does PAPS work?

- In 2002, PAPS usage became mandatory for truck carriers at land border ports of entry. PAPS is only available to carriers that have been approved by CBP and have been issued a U.S. Standard Carrier Alpha Code (SCAC). A carrier may apply for a SCAC through the National Motor Freight Traffic Association (NMFTA).
- Integral to the PAPS process is a bar-code label that is affixed to each invoice. The bar code is attached prior to a shipment's arrival in the U.S. Each bar code is unique and contains shipment information including a carrier's SCAC and Pro-Bill number.
- Carriers will fax all required shipment information, including the PAPS bar code, to a customs broker in the U.S. The broker will forward the information to CBP via the agency's Automated Broker Index (ABI) system. That information must be transmitted at least one hour prior to a shipment's scheduled arrival at the border.
- CBP will retrieve that information and determine if the shipment warrants additional inspection by a customs agent or if the shipment can be cleared for entry.
- Upon arrival at the border, a CBP agent will scan the bar code, which automatically retrieves the entry information from ABI. If no additional inspection is required, the shipment is cleared for entry.



PAPS allows U.S. customs agents to focus on high-risk or unknown shipments.

What are the benefits of PAPS?

The single largest benefit of PAPS is expedited clearance upon arrival at the border. Low-risk, “routine” shipments arrive at the border precleared for entry and thus are able to skip over the queue of shipments awaiting inspection.

Other benefits include the following:

- 24/7 tracking capability through “PAPS Release Trackers,” available through most customs brokers or logistics providers
- Ability to generate reports
- Expedited clearance, which clears the way for access to U.S. distribution routes and on-time deliveries to U.S. customers

How can a business take advantage of PAPS?

Because participation in PAPS is only available to qualified carriers, it is essential to make sure that your logistics partner has the necessary certification. Ask for your carrier’s SCAC, which is proof of PAPS eligibility.

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