

the payment. Approximately 33 percent of the roughly 450 trucks arriving daily at the Houlton port of entry pay the user fee in cash.

The inspector who collects the \$5.00 fee at Houlton rings it into the cash register and issues a receipt to the driver. The senior inspector or supervisor will then reconcile the cash each day and turn it over to either a Customs aide or supervisor for a second verification, and the money then will be placed in the safe. Two or three times a week, an SF 215B Deposit Form is prepared by the Customs aide or a supervisor, and the money is driven to the local bank for deposit. This procedure requires many man-hours of administrative work and is not an efficient method for the collection and processing of the \$5.00 cash fees.

To address this situation, Customs at Houlton, Maine put together a Process Improvement Group: the Group was comprised of representatives from Yellow Freight Trucking, the American Trucking Association, and Roadway Express, Inc., the Vice President of KeyBank of Maine, and two Customs Management Center facilitators. The members of this Group were guided through the process improvement techniques, created a mission statement, and determined that the test program should only be conducted at Houlton, Maine and Champlain, New York, and that, if successful, it could then be expanded to other test locations. The mission statement adopted for this test program states that it is to develop an efficient system/process for user fee payments by trucks, without the use of cash or decals, for the benefit of all users and Customs. The Group concluded that some form of automated debit technology, such as a credit or debit card system, should be utilized, one which would be uniform in application nationally and would accept major credit cards such as VISA and MASTERCARD.

#### **The Proposed Truck User Fee Collection System at Houlton**

According to the simplified procedure proposed to be tested, the Customs inspector will visually check the truck window for the presence of a user fee decal. If there is no decal, the inspector will either collect the U.S. \$5.00 in accordance with the existing procedure, or accept a VISA or MASTERCARD credit card from the driver, process it through an automated system that will deposit the user fee directly into the Treasury account via the Mellon Bank, issue a receipt to the driver, keep a copy for Customs accounting purposes, and process the merchandise transaction.

In this scenario, there will be much less handling of currency, less administrative work required of supervisors and senior inspectors, more control over the deposits, and fewer trips to the bank to deliver cash. It will also allow those trucking companies with "captive" fleets to use all of their trucks for cross-border work, whether or not they have decals. This system actually could eliminate the need for truck decals altogether.

The implementation of such a user-friendly system would enable Customs internal and external customers to work more efficiently and effectively, eliminate the need for processing cash by Customs inspectors, provide a secure deposit of fees directly into the Treasury account, and free up resources and equipment for all concerned.

To aid in the development of this initiative, Customs proposes a temporary change to the current procedures concerning the collection of truck user fees to allow for the electronic payment of this user fee by credit card. Accordingly, the fee payment requirements contained in § 24.22(i)(1) of the Customs Regulations will be suspended during this test period so that electronic commerce technology will be accepted. This procedure will only apply at the ports located at Houlton, Maine and Champlain, New York, and will not otherwise affect the procedures relating to other forms of user fee payments which are still in effect. Trucking companies who wish to participate in this pilot program should experience faster service, fewer delays at the truck booth, and enhanced service to their cross-border customers.

Pursuant to Customs Modernization provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (the Act), Pub. L. 103-182, 107 Stat. 2057, 2170 (December 8, 1993), Customs amended its regulations (19 CFR chapter I), in part, to enable the Commissioner of Customs to conduct limited test programs/procedures designed to evaluate the effectiveness of new technology or operations procedures, which have as their goal the more efficient and effective processing of passengers, carriers, and merchandise. Section 101.9(a) of the Customs Regulations (19 CFR 101.9(a)) allows for such general testing. See, TD 95-21. This test is established pursuant to that regulatory provision.

The implementation date for a test of this new procedure will be in early May of 1998 (approximately 30 days from publication in the **Federal Register**). Upon implementation, Customs at Houlton, Maine and Champlain, New

York will begin an evaluation period of at least six months to ensure the effectiveness of the program and to identify any shortfalls. If the program is successful, Customs will amend its regulations to make the new procedure permanent.

#### **Regulatory Provisions Affected**

During the automated user fee collection test, the normal user fee collection requirements of 19 CFR 24.22(i)(1) will be suspended.

#### **Enforcement Provisions**

Nothing in this test in any way interferes with Customs enforcement activities. Cargo will still be examined for compliance with laws and regulations, stratified examinations will continue, and targeted shipments will be stripped out of the trucks and examined as usual.

#### **Comments and Evaluation of Test**

Customs will review all public comments received concerning any aspect of the test program or procedures, and finalize procedures in light of those comments. Approximately 120 days after the conclusion of the test, evaluations of the test will be conducted and final results will be made available to the public upon request.

Dated: April 7, 1998.

**Robert S. Trotter,**

*Assistant Commissioner, Office of Field Operations.*

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### **UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY**

#### **Culturally Significant Objects Imported for Exhibition Determination**

Notice is hereby given of the following determination: Pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Act of October 19, 1965 (79 Stat. 985, 22 U.S.C. 2459), Executive Order 12047 of March 27, 1978 (43 FR 13359, March 29, 1978), and Delegation Order No. 85-5 of June 27, 1985 (50 FR 27393, July 2, 1985), I hereby determine that the objects to be included in the exhibit, "Princes, Poets & Paladins" (See <sup>1</sup> list), imported from abroad for the temporary exhibition without profit within the United States, are of cultural significance. These objects are imported pursuant to a loan agreement with the foreign lenders. I

<sup>1</sup> A copy of this list may be obtained by contacting Ms. Lorie Nierenberg, Assistant General Counsel, at (202) 619-6084, and the address is U.S. Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW, Room 700, Washington, DC 20547-0001.

also determine that the temporary exhibition or display of the listed exhibit objects at The Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA from on or about May 16, 1998 to on or about August 29, 1998, is in the national interest. Public Notice of this determination is ordered to be published in the **Federal Register**.

Dated: April 7, 1998.

**Les Jin,**

*General Counsel.*

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