

Electronic Container Seal Operational Test – a partnership of the USDOT, the Washington State Dept. of Transportation, US Customs, the US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), Ports of Seattle and Tacoma, TransCore and Westwood Shipping.

Two operational tests of disposable, electronic container door seals are in progress in the Pacific Northwest. The seals are being tested as a means to track shipping containers both in ports and along roadways. Because the seals have a tamper indicator, they are also being tested as a way to increase the security of cargo movements. Many shipments that come into the Pacific Northwest ports are sent in-bond to Canada. This means that the shippers post a bond to ensure that the containers will not be opened in the USA. The bonds are cleared when the containers leave the USA. If there is no record of the shipment leaving the country, the bond cannot be cleared and a fine may be levied. Significant economic benefits can accrue to shippers through the utilization of electronic clearance systems. There are also substantial agency benefits in reduced bottlenecks at border crossings through the elimination of paperwork. Regulatory agencies can also focus resources on inspection and security tasks instead of tracking misplaced paperwork.

The USDA is using the seals at the Port of Tacoma to track food products bound for Canada. USDA inspectors program each seal with a unique number, lock the seal in place and enter the number into the project's database. Once the sealed container passes under a reader at the border crossing at Blaine, WA, the system reports to the USDA that the shipment has exited the USA. So far, USDA inspectors have installed approximately 60 seals.

The second test evaluates the ability of the seal to function internationally, from supplier to ultimate destination. Westwood Shipping installs the seals in Japan on containers of automobile parts destined for Canada. These containers pass through the Port of Seattle, after posting a bond to insure that they won't be opened in the USA, and are drayed by truck to Canada. So far, about 60 containers have been sealed in Japan and shipped to the USA on ten ships.

In addition to the partners listed above, the projects are being conducted in partnership with marine carriers, trucking firms, the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation, Transport Canada and others. WSDOT and the USDOT have shared the funding for the \$700,000 project. USDOT has contracted with SAIC to conduct an evaluation of the operational tests. The evaluation is available on the Web at \_\_\_\_\_.

The e-seal project will continue until the remaining 1000 seals are used. Feedback from the partners is being used to improve system operations. The USDOT has funded a second phase of the project with the goal of developing a performance specification for a seal or family of electronic seals, taking into account today's need for increased container security, and then testing those seals.