

European Union's AEO Customs Program

The Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program was officially launched in Europe on January 1, 2008. The EU hopes that this security initiative will benefit both importers and exporters with expedited clearance and increased security for shipments entering or leaving the European Union. EU companies that obtain an AEO certificate may receive priority treatment at European customs, expedited passage through third country borders, and reduced entry/exit declaration documentation. They would also be given priority treatment during the resumption of trade following a potential incident.

Application for an AEO certificate can only be made by "economic operators" established in the European Union. Limited exemptions are provided to certain airlines and steamship lines outside of the EU. Though widely compared to the U.S. C-TPAT, there are substantial differences between the programs. AEO addresses both import and export while C-TPAT is strictly import focused. AEO does not provide for validations of foreign suppliers; rather, it relies on the development of similar programs in trading partner countries.

The EU and US DHS have been discussing mutual recognition of their security programs but final agreement may be sometime in the future.