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Why are an overseas supplier or the Customs Broker asking for my social security number/tax ID number/IRS number/importer number/EIN#?

When an individual or company purchases goods from an overseas supplier, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) considers them the ultimate importer. The ultimate importer can clear the goods or have a Customs Broker clear them on their behalf.

If the supplier hires a carrier that provides door to door service, the carrier service usually has brokers in their supply chain to clear the goods on behalf of the ultimate importer. If a formal entry is required, CBP regulations require the broker to put the ultimate importer's identification number on the CBP Form 7501- Entry Summary.

The ultimate importer's identification number is either the Employers Identification Number (EIN) tax identification number assigned by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or the importer's social security number. The EIN is issued for the purpose of tax administration and is not intended for participation in any other activities. For additional information about EIN, please visit the IRS web page.

Because many foreign merchants are aware that CBP requires an identification number for the ultimate importer for formal entries, they will often request the purchaser's social security number to include on export documents that the broker will subsequently rely on to prepare the CBP entry.

If an identification number is not provided, the Customs Broker will have to request one from the importer to file a US Customs entry, this is not only extremely time-consuming and in the current world fast paced deliveries, not practical, but will result in clearance delays and possible additional airport and terminal high storage charges.

Pease contact Gava if you have any questions on this article.