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CBP Moves U.S. Virgin Islands Toward Fully Digital Cargo Processing With Pay.gov Payments

Importers in the USVI will soon be able to pay duties, taxes, and fees electronically through Pay.gov, as Customs and Border Protection expands automation across the territory's commercial process and reduces reliance on paper-based transactions.

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The Crown Bay Cargo Facility.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has announced what it described as a major step forward in trade modernization for the U.S. Virgin Islands, with the introduction of Pay.gov for the payment of duties, taxes, and fees on imported merchandise.

In the coming months, importers will be able to submit those payments electronically through Pay.gov, a change CBP says will move the territory closer to a fully automated commercial process. The new system will apply to all cargo arriving from the continental United States, Puerto Rico, and foreign locations.

As the electronic platform is rolled out, paper-based payments at U.S. Virgin Islands ports of entry will be sharply reduced. CBP said it will prioritize cargo and importation transactions completed through electronic payment systems.

The agency said the adoption of Pay.gov is intended to give importers, residents, and travelers a faster, secure, and user-friendly way to manage payments. Users who create a Pay.gov account will be able to save payment information, track transactions, and manage recurring payments.

For formal entries, importer, broker, and service provider payments can be made by ACH debit from a U.S. bank account. CBP said payment data will synchronize in real time with Automated Commercial Environment entry records, a feature expected to reduce errors and speed up cargo release. For informal entries, residents and travelers will be able to pay duty amounts using a credit or debit card.

“Pay.gov is a game changer for the U.S. Virgin Islands,” said Area Port Director for the US Virgin Islands Todd Bellew. “This new platform will make it faster and easier for importers to meet their obligations, while giving CBP the tools to process cargo more efficiently and securely. It’s a win for trade and for the territory.”

CBP said the payment shift is part of a broader strategy to automate the territory’s commercial operations. In the near future, the agency expects to introduce additional digital tools aimed at further streamlining cargo processing, improving compliance, and enhancing the experience for the trade community, including Electronic Manifest.

Alongside the Pay.gov rollout, CBP said it will require cargo manifests to be submitted electronically through the Automated Commercial Environment and Electronic Data Interchange systems. According to the agency, electronic manifest transmission provides critical advance cargo notice needed to secure America’s Caribbean border.

To comply, carriers will need to use specific port codes when transmitting electronic manifest information to the U.S. Virgin Islands. For shipments originating in the continental United States and Puerto Rico and destined for the territory, carriers must add the designated foreign port codes 91155 for St. Thomas, 91195 for St. John, and 91149 for St. Croix to their internal proprietary systems. For foreign shipments to the U.S. Virgin Islands, carriers must use domestic port codes 5101 for St. Thomas, 5102 for St. John, and 5104 for St. Croix.

CBP said carriers will be required to test their systems with the agency to ensure proper data transmission. Importers and filers, meanwhile, must continue requesting cargo release through the USVICEI mailbox in order to obtain CBP authorization for delivery.

The agency said it will provide a grace period for carriers and importers to adjust to the new requirements. Once that period ends, penalties may be imposed for non-compliance, and cargo release could be delayed.

CBP said the changes are authorized under the Trade Act of 2002 and federal customs regulations governing operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands, which require the advance electronic submission of cargo information.

The agency described the effort as part of a broader modernization push in the territory, where customs processing is being reshaped around digital systems intended to improve efficiency, strengthen compliance, and reduce delays tied to manual transactions.

CBP is the nation's largest federal law enforcement agency and is responsible for securing America's borders while facilitating lawful international trade and travel.

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