



Report in Brief

November 1, 2023

Background

The International Trade Administration's (ITA's), a bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce (the Department), mission is to create prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements. Preventing, reducing, or removing foreign trade barriers creates opportunities for U.S. companies to increase exports. ITA broadly defines a trade barrier as a foreign government policy, practice, or procedure that unfairly or unnecessarily restricts U.S. exports.

ITA is organized into three primary business units: Global Markets (GM), Enforcement and Compliance (E&C), and Industry and Analysis (I&A). All three ITA business units work with U.S. industries and businesses to resolve foreign trade barriers. GM addresses market access barriers. The majority of trade barriers reported during any given year are market access barriers.

ITA uses Salesforce; a commercial, off-the-shelf product; to track trade barrier casework and document the foreign trade barrier resolution process, from open to close. A foreign trade barrier case is considered closed when a decisive event occurs in the management of a case.

Why We Did This Review

Our objective was to assess ITA's progress and actions to prevent, reduce, and remove foreign trade barriers. To address this objective, we assessed ITA's process for (1) identifying and resolving trade barriers; (2) receiving, recording, and monitoring foreign trade barriers reported by U.S. companies; and (3) selecting trade barrier cases for reporting to stakeholders.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE ADMINISTRATION

ITA Did Not Effectively Resolve Foreign Trade Barriers

OIG-24-004-A

WHAT WE FOUND

We found that ITA did not effectively prevent, reduce, and remove foreign trade barriers to increase exports of U.S. goods and services and to ensure American businesses and workers have an equal opportunity to compete within foreign markets. Specifically,

- I. ITA does not strategically manage trade barrier cases to ensure resources are effectively used to meet the needs of U.S. businesses.
- II. ITA did not ensure the completeness and accuracy of data reported in Salesforce.
- III. ITA performance measures do not accurately report its efforts to assist U.S. companies in resolving trade barriers.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Under Secretary for International Trade

1. Develop criteria and guidance for prioritizing trade barrier cases and identifying which cases might be a higher priority than others, based on the Administration's and the Department's goals, to ensure case contributor resources are used for cases that would have the most impact on the U.S. economy.
2. Develop a strategy to manage and monitor foreign trade barrier cases that addresses the growing demand for ITA's assistance from U.S. businesses and achieves the Department's strategic goals for U.S. trade policy.
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive workforce plan to: (a) determine optimal staffing levels needed to manage trade barrier cases and to clear the current backlog of unresolved cases and (b) identify any potential staffing shortfalls or gaps.
4. Develop and publish policies and procedures that specify when a trade barrier case should be entered into Salesforce and that require management to provide oversight to ensure that cases are entered into Salesforce.
5. Require staff to consistently track and update case information in Salesforce to ensure that it is accurate and complete.
6. Develop and publish policies and procedures requiring supervisors to validate that sufficient evidence exists in Salesforce to warrant reporting as a Written Impact Narrative.
7. Establish objective performance measures to accurately assess and report ITA's progress in preventing, reducing, and removing foreign trade barriers.
8. Include a separate performance measure for reporting trade barriers that were prevented, reduced, and removed each fiscal year to show stakeholders ITA's effectiveness in assisting U.S. companies in resolving foreign trade barriers.