(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD TO PROVIDE CUSTOMS HARMONIZATION, TARIFF COMPUTATIONS, AND CENTRALIZED TARIFF COLLECTION FOR INTERNATIONAL SHIPPERS**

(75) Inventor: **Harry T. WHITEHOUSE**, Portola Valley, CA (US)

(73) Assignee: **PSI SYSTEMS, INC.**, Palo Alto, CA (US)

(57)   **ABSTRACT**

The systems and methods described herein relate generally to the integration of a shipping label with a customs form to provide a single label having postage, addressing, customs, and other information for international shipping, and in particular, to managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages. In one embodiment, managing the landed cost and harmonization may comprise generating a unique self-validating postage indicium or mark in response to a request that includes a description of contents for a package onto which an international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered. As such, the unique self-validating postage indicium or mark may indicate that landed costs for delivering the package to the destination country have been pre-paid, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium or mark and a customs declaration form may be printed on the international shipping label.

LC 610 000 837 US

Customs Declaration CN 22-Sender's Declaration

I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article, or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations. This copy will be retained at the post office for 30 days.

Sender's Name & Address

Addressee's Name & Address

Date and sender's signature

Detached from PS Form 2976, January 2004   **Post Office Copy**

LC 610 000 837 US

United States Postal Service
Customs Declaration   **CN 22**
May be opened officially   See Instruction on Reverse
Do not duplicate without USPS approval.

Cut ———————————— Out

☐ Gift   ☐ Commercial sample
☐ Documents   ☐ Other

Quantity and detailed description of contents (1)	Weight (2) lb. oz.	Value (3) (US $)
For commercial senders only If known, HS Tariff Number (4) and country of origin of goods (5)	Total Weight (6)	Total Value (7)(US $)

I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article, or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations.

Date and sender's signature (8)

PS Form 2976, January 2004   **Letter-Post**

10

20

30

40

FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

60

United States Postal Service
Customs Declaration and Dispatch Note - CP72
The item/parcel may be opened officially. Please print and press hard.
You are making multiple copies.

CP211268076US

From
Sender's Name   Your Name
Business
Street   123 Street Lane
City   Anytown   State   MD   ZIP Code®   12345
Country
Addressee's Name   SGT Joe Soldier
ATTN: Any Soldier
Business
Street   1st Bdg, 2nd IN

To
Postcode   City   APO AE 12345
Country   Iraq

Sender's Customs | Insured Number
Reference (if any) |

Insured Amount (US$)|SDR Value

Importer's Reference - Optional (if any)
(Tax Code/VAT no/Importer code)

Importer's Telephone/Fax/Email (if known)

Detailed Description of Contents(1)	Qty.(2)	Net Weight(3)		Value	For Commercial Senders Only
		lb.	oz.	(US$)(5)	HS Tariff Number(7)|Country of origin of goods(8)
Undershirts	8			$15	
Snacks (chips)	1			$3	
Magazines	6			$20	
Total Gross Wt.(4)				Total Value	Postage and Fees (9)
				(6) $38	

Check One ☒ Airmail/Priority   ☐ Surface/Nonpriority

Check One (10) ☒ Gift   ☐ Commercial sample   ☐ Other
☐ Documents ☐ Returned goods   Explanation:

Comments (11)(e.g. goods subject to quarantine, sanitary/phytosanitary inspection
or other restrictions)

License Number(s) (12)	Certificate Number(s) (13)	Invoice Number (14)

I certify that the particulars given in this | Date and sender's signature(15)
customs declaration are correct and that
this item does not contain any dangerous
article prohibited by legislation or by   Your Signature
postal or customs regulations.

Sender's instructions in Case of
Nondelivery (16)
☐ Treat as abandoned
☐ Return to Sender -
NOTE: Item subject to return
charges at sender's expense.
☒ Redirect to Address Below:
Give to any Clergy

Mailing Office Date
Stamp

PS Form **2976-A,** January 2004   Do not duplicate the form without USPS approval.   1-Customs Declaration
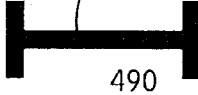
70

80

90

FIG. 2
PRIOR ART

INTERNET

13

12

11a: PC

11b: PRINTER
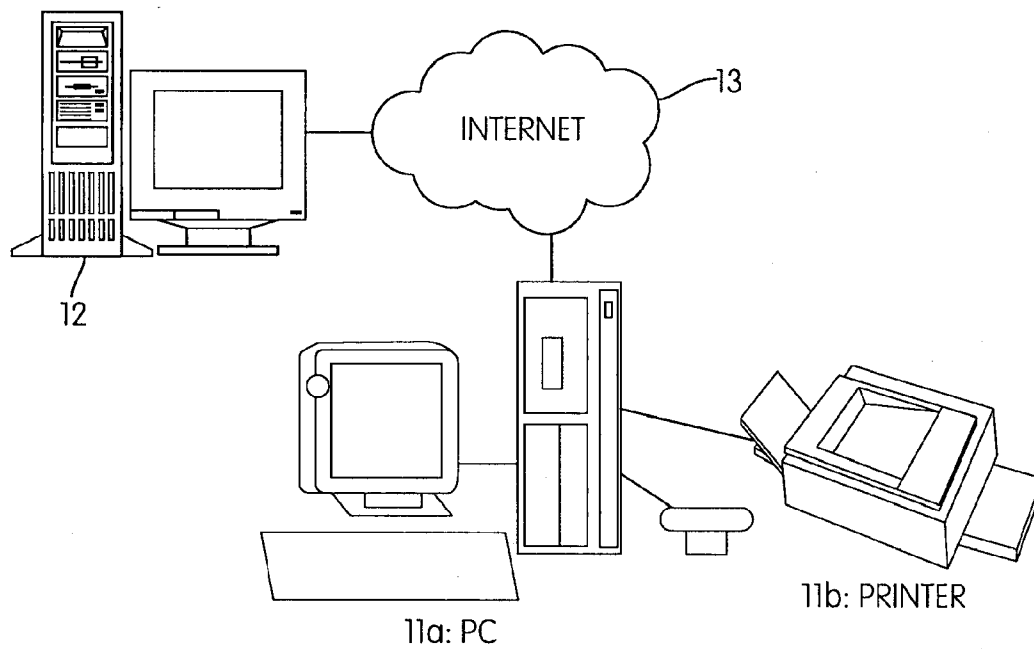
FIG. 3
PRIOR ART

400

420

450

425 — CP 614 990 009 US

From	To	
FIRSTNAME LASTNAME FIRM ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 URBANIZATION CITY ST 12345-6789 USA	ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 ADDRESS3 ADDRESS4 ADDRESS5 46807 PUERTO VALLARTA JALISCO MEXICO	470

430

Contents COMMERCIAL SAMPLE	Nondelivery Instructions	Return to Sender [Note: Subject to return charges at sender's expense]

460

Detailed description of contents	Qty.	Weight lb.	oz.	Value (US$)	HS Tariff number	Country of Origin
12345678901234567980132456798013245678901	100	10	10	1.00	123451	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678902	101	11	11	2.00	123452	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678903	102	12	12	3.00	123453	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678904	103	13	13	4.00	123454	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678905	104	14	14	5.00	123455	USA

480

Insured Number	123456789012345678 9012	Total Weight	Total Value (US$)	SDR Value
Insured Amount (US$) 400.00		15	15	15.00	14.92

I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the
particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any
dangerous article or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations.

Sender's signature   Date

Global Economy Parcel Post

410

490

FIG. 4

500

CP 614 990 009 US

FIRSTNAME LASTNAME FIRM From ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 URBANIZATION CITY ST 12345-6789 USA	ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 ADDRESS3 To ADDRESS4 ADDRESS5 46807 PUERTO VALLARTA JALISCO MEXICO

Contents DOCUMENTS	Nondelivery Instructions	Return to Sender [Note: Subject to return charges at sender's expense]

Detailed description of contents	Qty.	Weight lb. oz.		Value (US$)	HS Tariff number	Country of Origin
123456789012345679801324567980132456789 0 1	100	10	10	1.00	123451	USA
123456789012345679801324567980132456789 0 2	101	11	11	2.00	123452	USA
123456789012345679801324567980132456789 0 3	102	12	12	3.00	123453	USA
123456789012345679801324567980132456789 0 4	103	13	13	4.00	123454	USA
123456789012345679801324567980132456789 0 5	104	14	14	5.00	123455	USA

Insured Number 12345678901234567 89012		Total Weight	Total Value	SDR Value
Insured Amount (US$) 400.00		15	15	(US$) 15.00	14.92

I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations.

Sender's signature   Date

Global Airmail Parcel Post

510

FIG. 5

600

CP 614 990 009 US

| From | FIRSTNAME LASTNAME FIRM ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 URBANIZATION CITY ST 12345-6789 USA | To | ADDRESS1 ADDRESS2 ADDRESS3 ADDRESS4 ADDRESS5 46807 PUERTO VALLARTA JALISCO MEXICO |

| Contents   MERCHANDISE | Nondelivery Instructions   Treat as Abandonded |

Detailed description of contents	Qty.	Weight lb.	oz.	Value (US$)	HS Tariff number	Country of Origin
12345678901234567980132456798013245678901	100	10	10	1.00	123451	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678902	101	11	11	2.00	123452	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678903	102	12	12	3.00	123453	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678904	103	13	13	4.00	123454	USA
12345678901234567980132456798013245678905	104	14	14	5.00	123455	USA

| Insured Number   12345678901234567890012 | Total Weight | Total Value (US$) | SDR Value 14.92 |
| Insured Amount (US$)   400.00 | 15 | 15 | 15.00 | |

I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations.

| Sender's signature | Date |

Global Priority Mail

610

FIG. 6

700

705
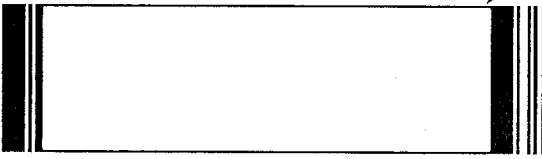
$3.80   US POSTAGE
INTL MAIL

MAR 11 2004
Mailed from ZIP 94301

730

750

endicia.com   071V00500361

INTL ECONOMY LETTER POST

710

Scott Montgomery
PSI Systems
247 High St.
Palo Alto, CA 94301-1041
USA

**SHIP
TO:**

Emma Hardy
Flat 3
2 Grantley Road
Boscombe
Bournemouth, Dorset BH5-1HW
GREAT BRITAIN

720

SAMPLE-DO NOT MAIL

740

LC 614 996 658 US

e/ CUSTOMS DECLARATION   CN22

May be opened officially.

760

☐ Gift   ☐ Documents   ☒ Commercial Sample   ☐ Other

Quantity and detailed description of contents	Weight	Value (US $)
1 Mens cotton shirt	2 oz.	$35.00
Country of origin: Mexico Totals	1 lb.	$35.00

I certify that this item does not contain any dangerous article prohibited by postal regulations.

Signature: Date:

FIG. 7

800

DAZzle Designer 2004 - zebra international label	□|□|☒
File	Edit	Insert	Layout	Postage	Help

🖶 Print | 💲 Buy | International Mail Shipping Label (top) | ▽ | International Airmail Parcel | ▽ | 1 lb | ▽ | Weight

🖎 Design |🗏 Address Book |

815

805

700

810

FIG. 8

900   940   945   950   960   970

935 | Postage Rates for Italy | ☒ |

910 ─ Rates | Prohibitions | Restrictions | Observations | Customs Forms | Areas Served | Express Mail |

The following are the Package rates for Italy. The rates shown ONLY apply to an item that weighs no more than 1 lb.
Please be sure to check the prohibitions and restrictions for mail to Italy.   930

Postage Type: International, Airmail Parcel | ▽ | Weight: 1 lb | ▽ |

920

Description	Postage	Max Weight	Service Time	Maximum Size
Airmail Parcel Post	$14.00	70 lbs.	4-10 Days	Max Length 79" max

◁||▷

OK | Cancel

FIG. 9A

935   900

Postage\Rates for France   ☒

| Rates | Prohibitions | Restrictions | Observations | Customs Forms | Areas Served | Express Mail |

The following items are prohibited for mailing to France.

936 —

Arms, ammunition.
Cigarette lighters using butane gas.
Feeding bottles.
Funeral urns.
Goods bearing false marks of French manufacture or origin.
Imitation pearls containing lead salts and any articles of jewelry with pearls of this type.
Measuring instruments marked in units not complying with French law.
Perishable infectious biological substances except as noted in Restrictions below.
Perishable noninfectious biological substances except as noted under Restrictions below.
937 — Radioactive materials.
Saccharine in tablets or packets.

Live plants and animals
Arms and weapons.
Human remains:

[OK]   [Cancel]

FIG. 9B

900   940

Postage Rates for France   ☒

| Rates | Prohibitions | Restrictions | Observations | Customs Forms | Areas Served | Express Mail |

The following restrictions apply to mail for France.

941 —

Bees, honey, and beeswax must be accompanied by a certificate of origin and noninfection issued by a qualified official approved by the Government. Shipments of honey not exceeding 2 kilograms do not require the certificate.

Books in the French language printed abroad must have the names of the publisher and printer shown as prescribed by the French copyright laws.

Canned vegetables, fish, plums, and nuts not bearing an indication of the country of origin by stamping, in plain raised or sunken letters at least 4 millimeters high, in the middle of the top or bottom and in a place not bearing any inscription.

Gold coins or other articles of gold require that the addressee have a permit issued by the Bank of France (not required for gold-plated articles or for ornaments or jewelry containing only small amounts of gold and weighing 500 grams or less).

Medicines and medicinal products require an import license issued by the Central Pharmaceutical Service of the Ministry of Health.

Perishable biological substances, infectious and noninfectious, are admitted when addressed to the following laboratories:
        1. Pasteur Institute
            25 rue du docteur Roux

[OK]   [Cancel]

FIG. 9C

1000   1026   1030   1040   1061

Print   ☒

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

Postage Options

1045 — Postage Type: [International Airmail Parcel ▽]   ☐ Oversized

1047 — Weight: [1 lb ▽] [Weigh]

1049 — Date: [2/12/2004 (Today)   ▽]   ☐ Remember this

1051 — Track/Confirm: [None   ▽]

1055 — Insurance: [None   ▽] [Info]   Value: [$10.00   ]   1057

Postage Amount: $14.00   Ending Balance: $6,734,288

1059 — Package Information

Description: [Cotton Shirt   ]

Group Code: [   ]   Reference ID: [   ]

☑ Keep these settings with current layout.

[Buy Postage]

[Postage Options...]

[International Rates...]   1065
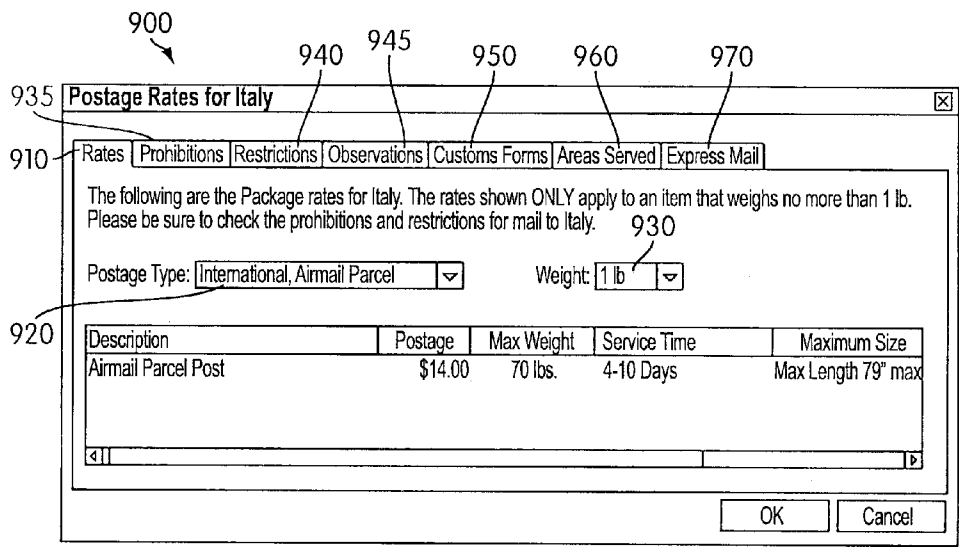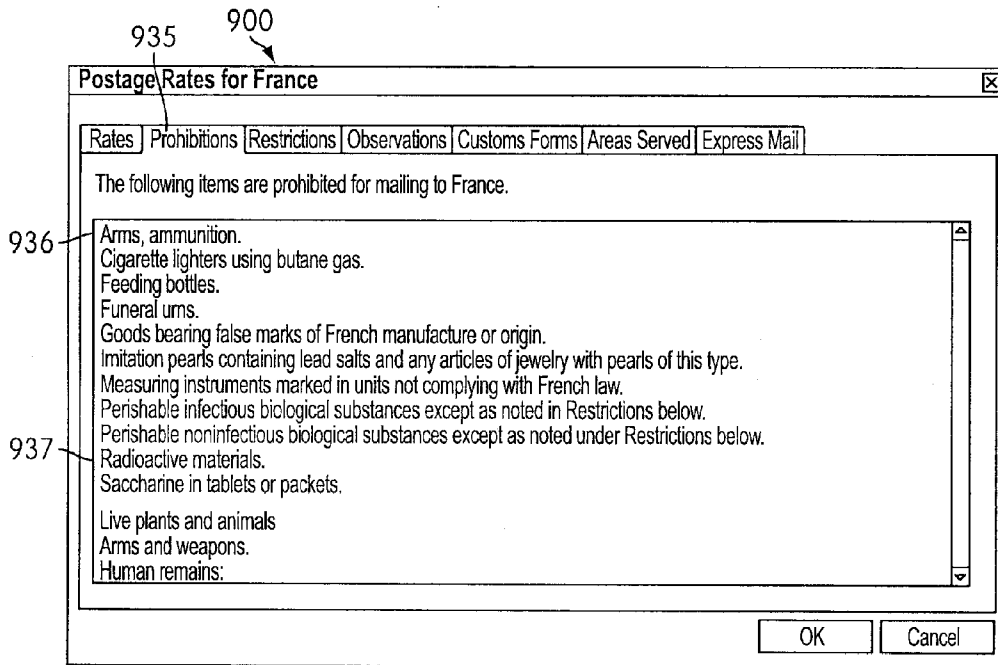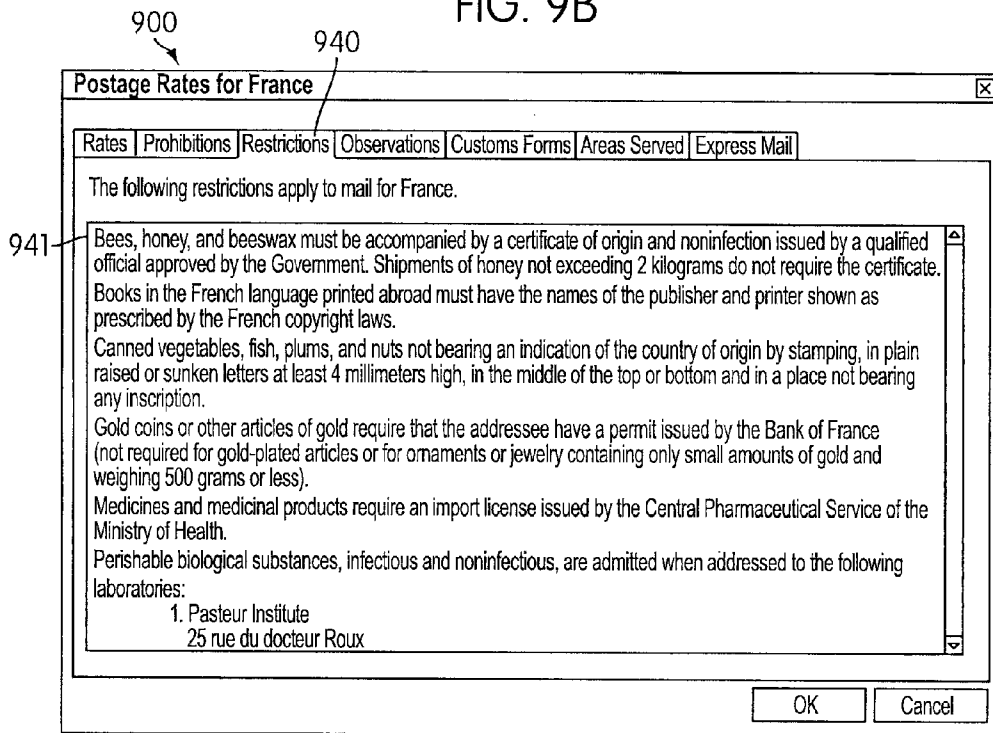
[Test Print]

1067

[Print] [Cancel] [Help]

FIG. 10

1000

1040

Print   ☒

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations.

1100 — Customs Declaration Form

⦿ Form 2976 (CN22)   ○ Form 2976-A (CP72)   ○ Global Express Mail   ○ None

1110 — Package Contents

Item	Qty	Description	Weight	Value	Country of Origin
1	1	Cotton Shirt	10 oz.	$10.00	United States
2			0 oz.	$0.00	
3			0 oz.	$0.00	
4			0 oz.	$0.00	
5			0 oz.	$0.00	

1120 — Type of Contents

○ Sample   ⦿ Gift   ○ Documents   ○ Other

[Print] [Cancel] [Help]

FIG. 11

1200

1210

Customs Harmonization	☒

Search For | shirt cotton | ✓ OK   ☒ Cancel

Men's or boys' shirts, knitted or crocheted, of cotton
1220

ID	Description
61059000	Men's or boys' shirts, knitted or crocheted, of cotton
61059040	Men's or boys' shirts, of textile materials (ex wool, cotton or mmf) containing 70% or more by weight of silk
61059000	Men's or boys' shirts, of textile materials (ex wool, cotton or mmf) containing under 70% by weight of silk
61061000	Women's or girls' blouses and shirts, knitted or crocheted, of cotton
61069015	Women's or girls' blouses and shirts of textile materials (ex wool, cotton or mmf) containing 70% or more
61069025	Women's or girls' blouses and shirts of textile materials (ex wool, cotton or mmf) containing under 70% by
61072100	Men's or boys' nightshirts and pajamas, knitted or crocheted, of cotton

FIG. 12A

1230 1200

Customs Harmonization	☒

Search For | | ✓ OK   ☒ Cancel

Radioactive elements, isotopes, compounds, nesoi, alloys, dispersions, ceramic products and mixtures of these products radioactive residues.

HTS ID	Description
28444000	Radioactive elements, isotopes, compounds, nesoi, alloys, dispersions, ceramic products and mixtures of t

1240

1250

Customs Harmonization	☒

Search For | | ✓ OK   ☒ Cancel

Bleached beeswax 1255

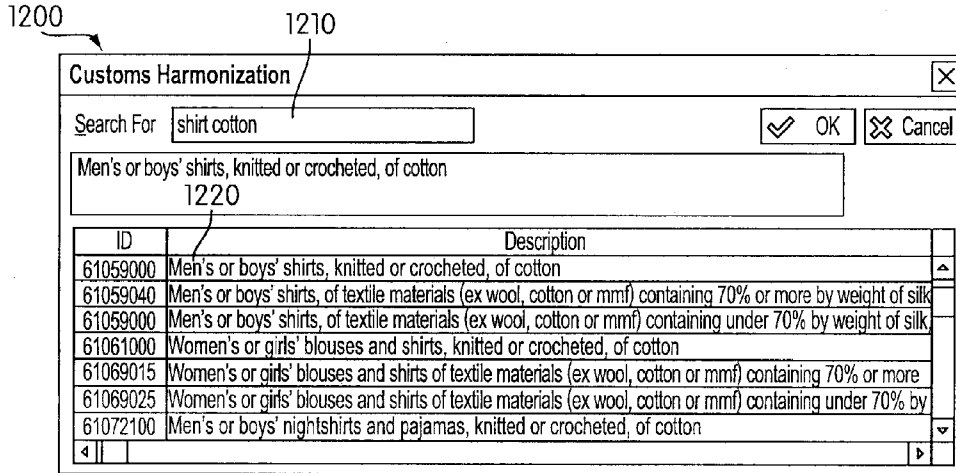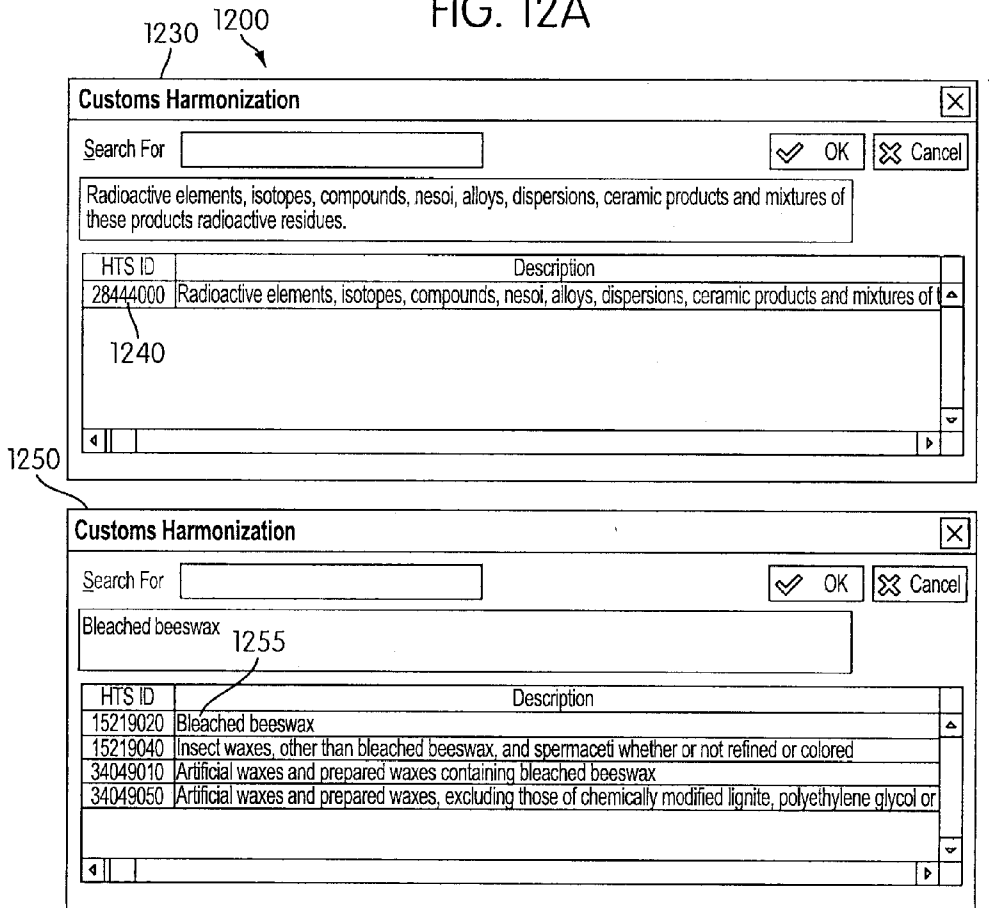| HTS ID	Description
15219020	Bleached beeswax
15219040	Insect waxes, other than bleached beeswax, and spermaceti whether or not refined or colored
34049010	Artificial waxes and prepared waxes containing bleached beeswax
34049050	Artificial waxes and prepared waxes, excluding those of chemically modified lignite, polyethylene glycol or

FIG. 12B

DAZzle Designer (USPS) - large priority mail international shipping label

File | Edit | Insert | Layout | Postage | Help

Print | $ Buy | Postage Options

Design | Address Book | Postage Log

PRIORITY
MAIL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

Customs Declaration Dispatch Note CP 72

CJ 230 383 176 US

1380

From:
Harry Whitehouse — 1370
Endicia Internet Postage
247 High St.
Palo Alto, CA 04001-100
US

To:
MIA & GABRIELLE DUROUX
56 RUE DES RETAILLONS
33300 BORDEAUX
FRANCE

ITN/Exemption Code:
NOEEI 30.37(a)

$39.85   US POSTAGE
SAMPLE Mailed from ZIP 94301
Medium Flat Rate Box, Priority Mail Intl
Commercial Base Pricing

**VOID-DO NOT MAIL **

endicia.com   071V00500361

Insured Number:

Insured Amount (US$):   SDR Value

Importer's Telephone/Fax/Email: 1395
Phone: Email:

Detailed description of contents:

Descriptions are entered at print time and will be printed here.

Qty.	Weight lb. oz.	Value (US$)	HS Tariff Number	Country of Origin
1	0	$0.00		

| Total Wt. 2 0 | Total Value $35.00 | Postage and Fees |

Nondelivery Instructions:

Contents: ☐ Gift   ☒ Commercial Sample   ☐ Other
           ☐ Documents   ☐ Returned Goods

Comments (e.g., goods subject to quarantine, sanitary/phytosanitary inspection, or other restrictions):

Sender's Customs Reference (if known):   Importer's Customs Reference—(Final or VAT-number of the addressed, if known):

License Number   Certificate Number: Invoice Number:

I certify the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct. This item does not contain any dangerous article prohibited by legislation or by the U.S. Postal Service of U.S. Customs and Border Protection regulations. I have met all applicable export filing requirements under the Foreign Track Regulations.
Sender's Signature:

PS FORM 2976-A Pt. II

Date:

Do not duplicate this form without USPS approval   The item/parcel may be opened officially   1-Customs Declaration
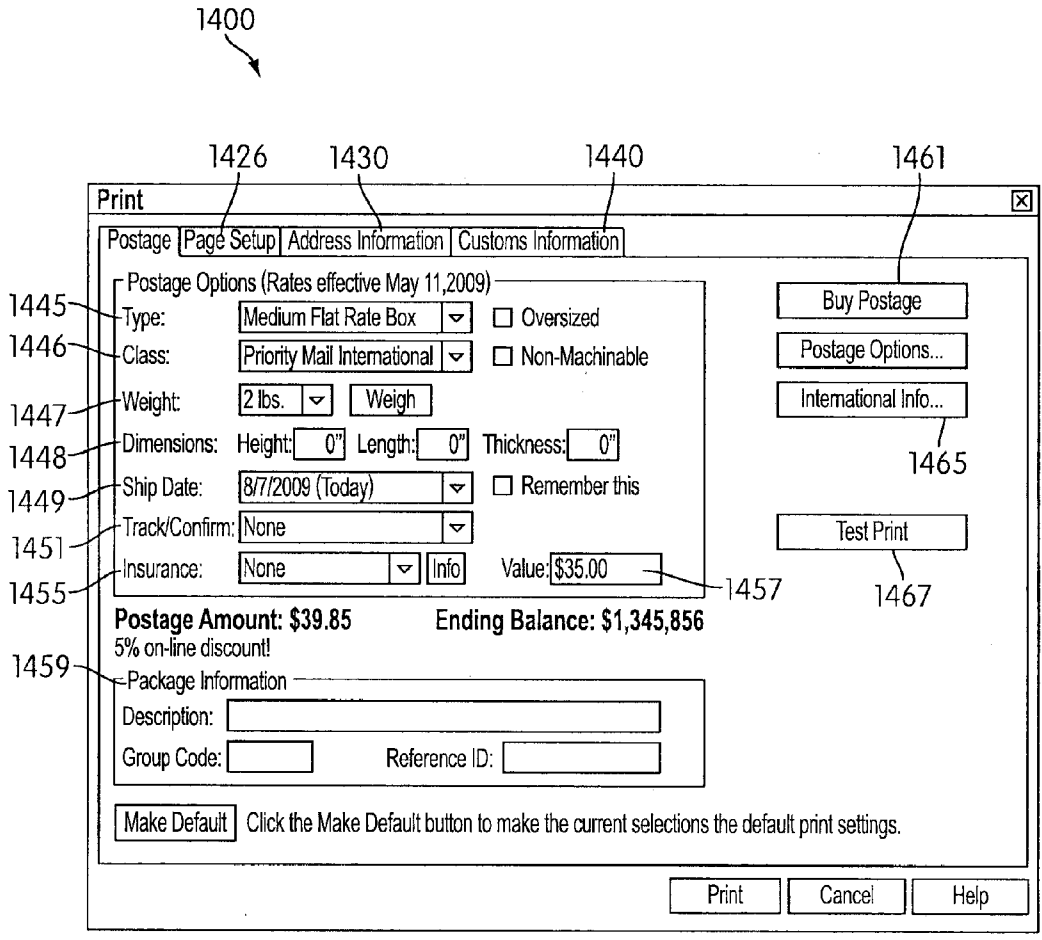
Mailing Office Date Stamp

Endicia Postage   AUG 7 2009   USPS

1300

1390

FIG. 13

1400

1426   1430   1440   1461

Print	☒

Postage |Page Setup| Address Information | Customs Information |

Postage Options (Rates effective May 11,2009)

1445— Type: Medium Flat Rate Box   ▽   ☐ Oversized   Buy Postage

1446— Class: Priority Mail International ▽   ☐ Non-Machinable   Postage Options...

1447— Weight: 2 lbs. ▽   Weigh   International Info...

1448— Dimensions: Height: 0" Length: 0" Thickness: 0"   1465

1449— Ship Date: 8/7/2009 (Today)   ▽   ☐ Remember this

1451— Track/Confirm: None   ▽   Test Print

1455— Insurance: None   ▽ Info   Value: $35.00   —1457   1467

Postage Amount: $39.85   Ending Balance: $1,345,856
5% on-line discount!

1459— Package Information

Description: [   ]

Group Code: [   ]   Reference ID: [   ]

Make Default	Click the Make Default button to make the current selections the default print settings.

                                         Print   Cancel   Help

FIG. 14

1400

1440

Print ☒

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations. Click International Info on Postage tab for more customs information.

1500

Customs Declaration Form
○ Form 2976 (CN22)   ◉ Form 2976-A (CP72)   ○ None   1516   1515

1510

Package Contents (Right click any row for options)

	Qty.		Description	Weight	Value	HTS ID	Country of Origin	
1	1	▽		0 oz.	$35.00		UNITED STATES	▽ △
2	0	▽		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▽
3	0	▽		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▽
4	0	▽		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▽
5	0	▽		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▽ ▽

1511

| Save | Retrieve | Clear | Harmonize | | 1518 | Instructions | Video |

1512   1513   1517   1519

1520

Type of Contents
◉ Commercial Sample   ○ Gift   ○ Documents   ○ Other   ○ Returned Goods   ○ Merchandise

1530

☐ Do not print separate customs form.   ☑ Fill in Postage and Fees

☐ I certify that the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct:

1540

| | (MUST be a person's name, not a company name)

| Print | Cancel | Help |

FIG. 15

1600

Harmonization Code   ☒

Harmonization assigns a unique number to your goods, which most countries recognize. Currently, this is an optional data requirement for customs forms.

To look up the harmonization code for your products, enter one or more keywords (for example, COOKIES or CHOCOLATE). As you enter text, the list changes dynamically and shows you only those Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) identities that meet your search criteria. To scroll through the entire list of HTS identities, remove all characters from the Enter Keywords field.

When you have found the correct term, select it, and then either double click the term or click OK. This action automatically places the HTS number in the Customs dialog box. When printing the label, only the first 6 digits of the HTS number are required by USPS.

1610 — Enter Keywords: | HATS | | OK | | Cancel | 1650

HTS ID	Description
6504000000	HATS AND OTHER HEADGEAR, PLAITED OR MADE BY ASSEMBLING STRIPS OF ANY MA
6505900900	FELT HATS AND OTHER FELT HEADGEAR, MADE FROM THE HAT BODIES, HOODS OR R
6505908600	OTHER HATS & OTHER HEADGEAR, KNITTED OR CROCHETED, OR MADE UP FROM LA
8449000000	MACHINERY FOR THE MANUFACTURE OR FINISHING OF FELT OR NONWOVENS IN THE

1620
1640

1630

FIG. 16

1400

1440

Print　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　⊠

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations. Click International Info on Postage tab for more customs information.

┌─ Customs Declaration Form ──────────────────────────────
1516　○ Form 2976 (CN22)　⊙ Form 2976-A (CP72)　○ None　　　1640

┌─ Package Contents (Right click any row for options) ──────────────

	Qty.		Description	Weight	Value	HTS ID	Country of Origin		
1	1	▾	FELT HATS & OTHER FELT H	0 lbs. 7 oz.	$35.00	6505900900	AFGHANISTAN	▾	▴
2	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▾	
3	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▾	
4	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▾	
5	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00		UNITED STATES	▾	▾

| Save | Retrieve | Clear | Harmonize |　1515　| Instructions | Video |

1650

┌─ Type of Contents ──────────────────────────────────────
○ Commercial Sample　○ Gift　○ Documents　○ Other　○ Returned Goods　⊙ Merchandise

☐ Do not print separate customs form.　　　　　　　　☑ Fill in Postage and Fees
☐ I certify that the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct:
[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　] (MUST be a person's name, not a company name)

| Print | Cancel | Help |

FIG. 17A

1400

1440

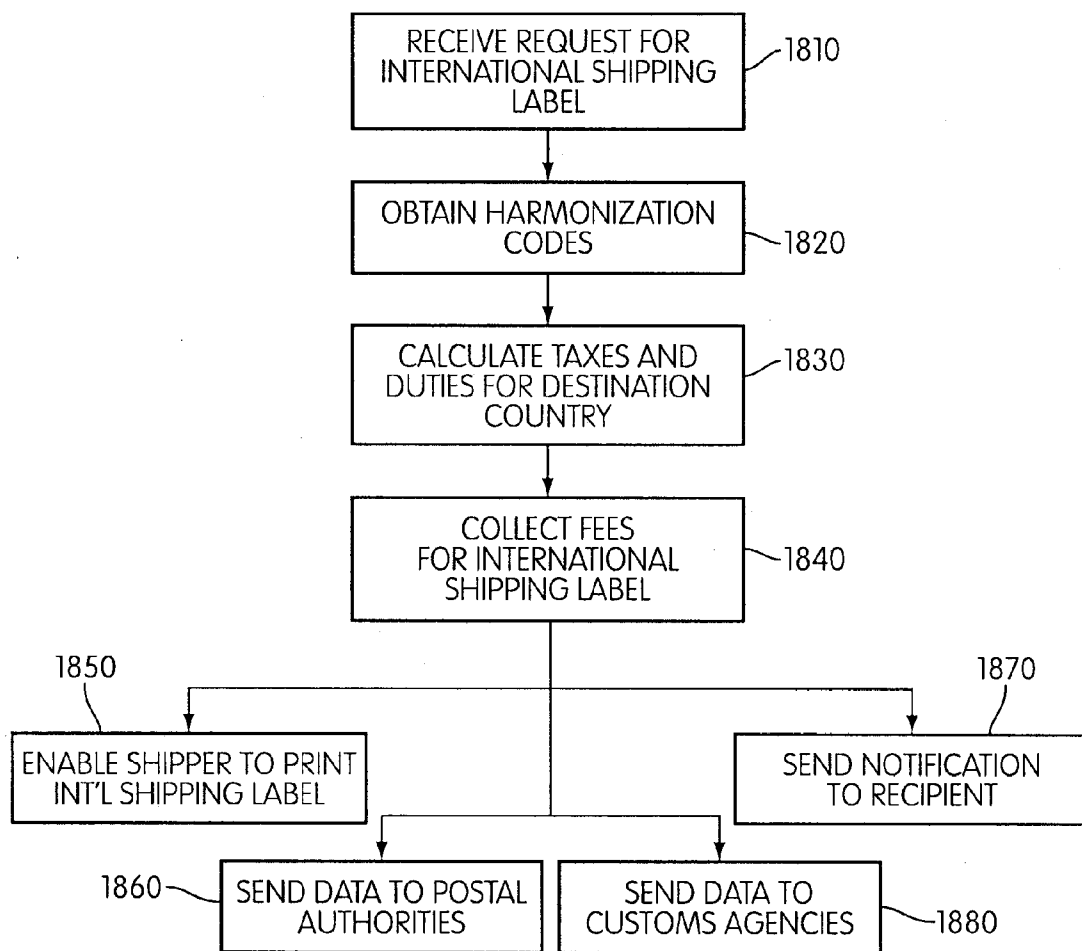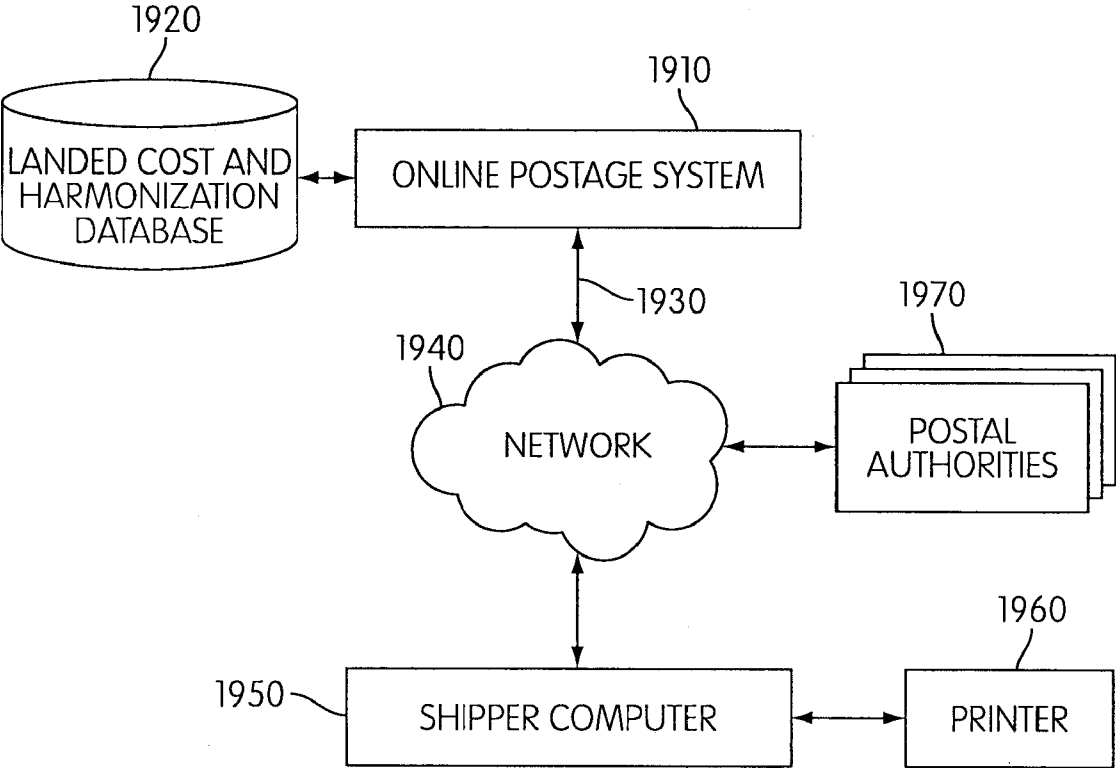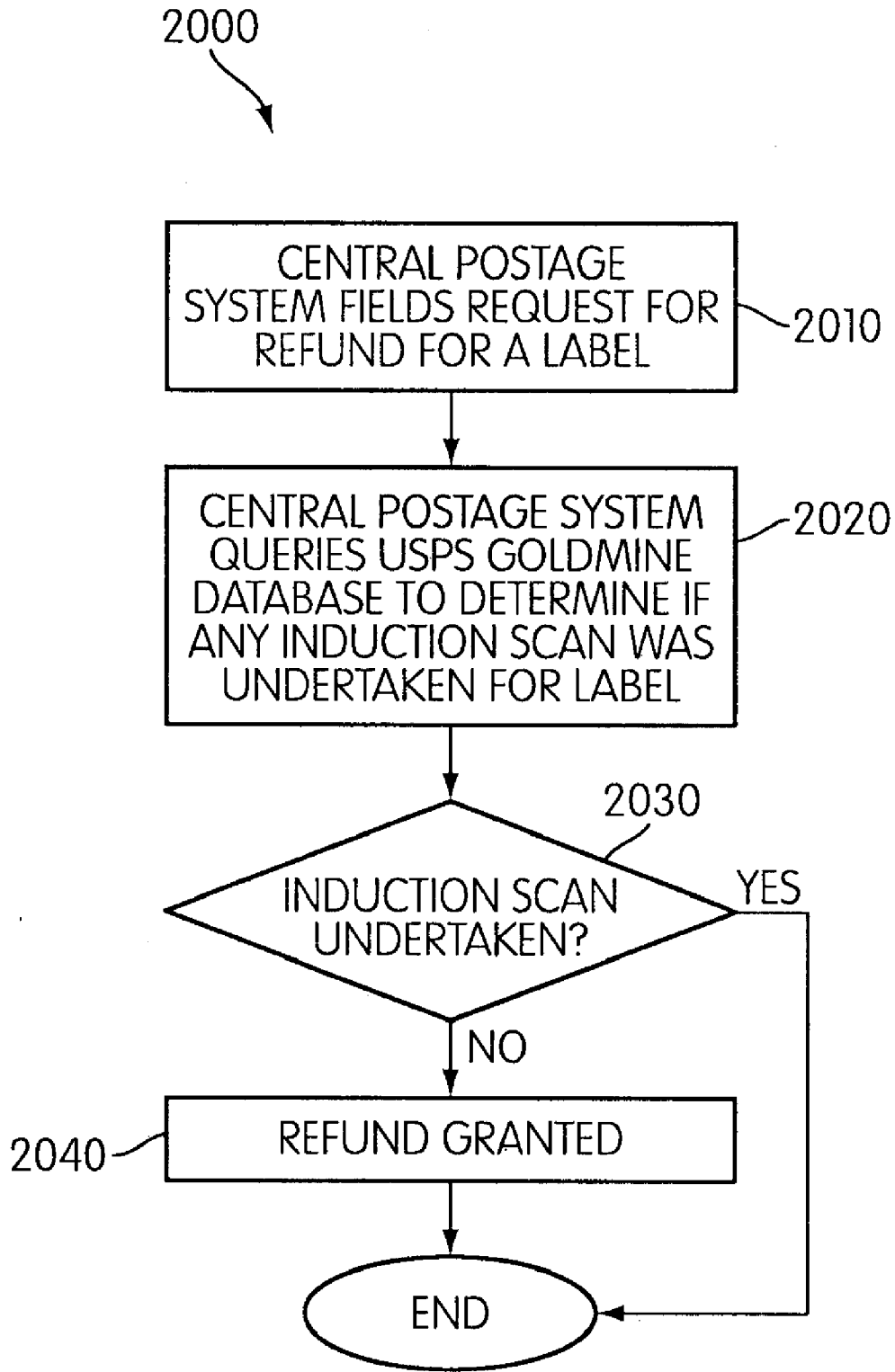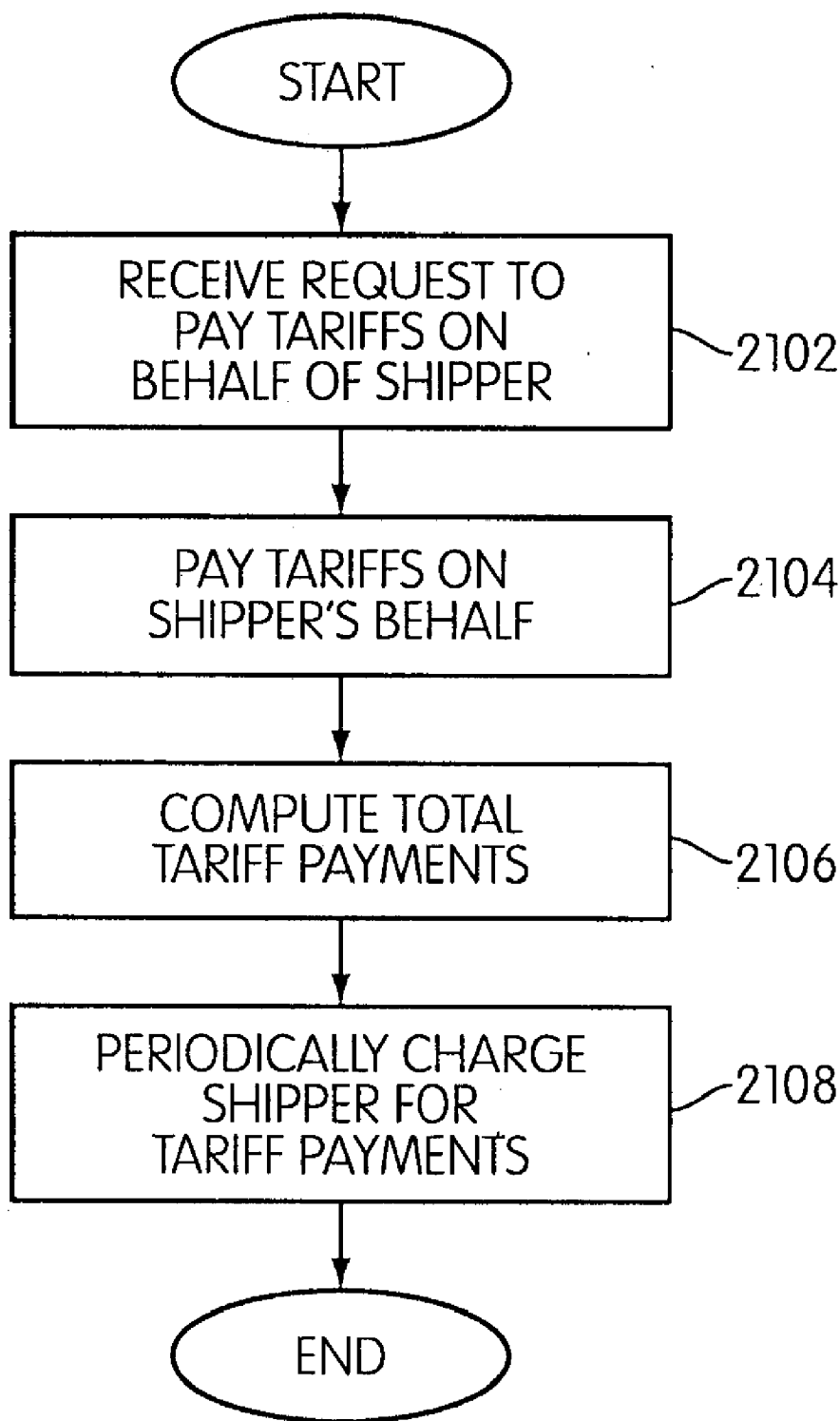**Print**   ⊠

Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations. Click International Info on Postage tab for more customs information.

┌ Customs Declaration Form ───
  ○ Form 2976 (CN22)   ⊙ Form 2976-A (CP72)   ○ None 1640A   1640B

1516

┌ Package Contents (Right click any row for options) ───────────────────────────

	Qty.		Description	Weight	Value	Export HTS	Import HTS	Country of Origin		Tax	Duty	
1	1	▾	SUGAR CONFECTION	6 lbs. 4 oz.	$115.00	170490	17049007	UNITED STATES	▾	$6.20	$0.00	▲
2	3	▾	MEN'S/BOYS' SHIRTS	2 lbs. 0 oz.	$95.40	610590	61059022	UNITED STATES	▾	$2.55	$3.00	
3	1	▾	WRIST WATCH ELECT	0 lbs. 5 oz.	$55.00	910119	91011960	UNITED STATES	▾	$1.25	$2.60	
4	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾	$0.00	$0.00	
5	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾	$0.00	$0.00	▾

| Save | | Retrieve | | Clear | | Harmonize | | Instructions | | Video |

1651

┌ Type of Contents ──
  ○ Commercial Sample   ○ Gift   ○ Documents   ○ Other   ○ Returned Goods   ⊙ Merchandise

☐ Do not print separate customs form.   ☑ Fill in Postage and Fees

☑ I certify that the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct:

| Harry Whitehouse | (MUST be a person's name, not a company name)

                                                      | Print | | Cancel | | Help |

FIG. 17B

RECEIVE REQUEST FOR
INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING
LABEL ⌐1810

OBTAIN HARMONIZATION
CODES ⌐1820

CALCULATE TAXES AND
DUTIES FOR DESTINATION
COUNTRY ⌐1830

COLLECT FEES
FOR INTERNATIONAL
SHIPPING LABEL ⌐1840

1850
ENABLE SHIPPER TO PRINT
INT'L SHIPPING LABEL

1870
SEND NOTIFICATION
TO RECIPIENT

1860⌐ SEND DATA TO POSTAL
AUTHORITIES

SEND DATA TO
CUSTOMS AGENCIES ⌐1880

FIG. 18

1920

1910

LANDED COST AND
HARMONIZATION
DATABASE

ONLINE POSTAGE SYSTEM

1930

1970

1940

NETWORK

POSTAL
AUTHORITIES

1960

1950

SHIPPER COMPUTER

PRINTER

FIG. 19

2000

CENTRAL POSTAGE
SYSTEM FIELDS REQUEST FOR
REFUND FOR A LABEL — 2010

CENTRAL POSTAGE SYSTEM
QUERIES USPS GOLDMINE
DATABASE TO DETERMINE IF
ANY INDUCTION SCAN WAS
UNDERTAKEN FOR LABEL — 2020

2030
INDUCTION SCAN
UNDERTAKEN?   YES

NO

2040 — REFUND GRANTED

END

FIG. 20

START

RECEIVE REQUEST TO
PAY TARIFFS ON
BEHALF OF SHIPPER ⟋2102

PAY TARIFFS ON
SHIPPER'S BEHALF ⟋2104

COMPUTE TOTAL
TARIFF PAYMENTS ⟋2106

PERIODICALLY CHARGE
SHIPPER FOR
TARIFF PAYMENTS ⟋2108

END

FIG. 21

2242

2240

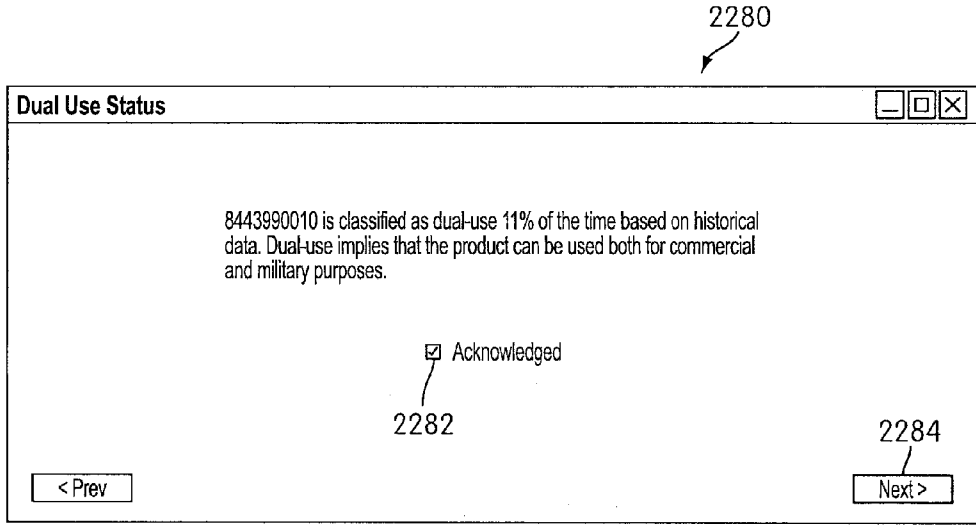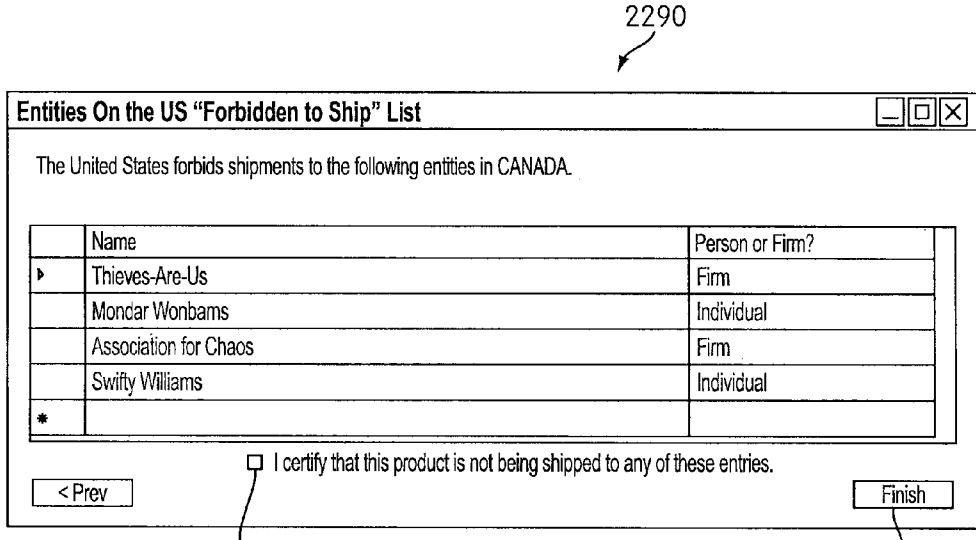Print   ☒

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations. Click International Info on Postage tab for more customs information.

Customs Declaration Form
O Form 2976 (CN22)   ⦿ Form 2976-A (CP72)   O None 2246

Package Contents (Right click any row for options)

	Qty.		Description	Weight	Value	Export HTS	Import HTS	Country of Origin		Tax	Duty	
1	1	▾		0 oz.	$55.00				▾			▲
2	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾			
3	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾			
4	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾			

◂ ‖   ▸ ▾

| Save | Retrieve | Clear | Harmonize | 2248 | Instructions | Video |

2244

Type of Contents
⦿ Commercial Sample   O Gift   O Documents   O Other   O Returned Goods   O Merchandise

☐ Do not print separate customs form.   ☑ Fill in Postage and Fees

☐ I certify that the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct:

[   ] (MUST be a person's name, not a company name)

| Print | Cancel | Help |

FIG. 22A

2250

Harmonization Code	☒

Harmonization assigns a unique number to your goods, which most countries recognize. Currently, this is an optional data requirement for customs forms.

To look up the harmonization code for your products, enter one or more keywords (for example, COOKIES or CHOCOLATE). As you enter text, the list changes dynamically and shows you only those Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) identities that meet your search criteria. To scroll through the entire list of HTS identities, remove all characters from the Enter Keywords field.

When you have found the correct term, select it, and then either double click the term or click OK. This action automatically places the HTS number in the Customs dialog box. When printing the label, only the first 6 digits of the HTS number are required by USPS.   ─2252   2259

Enter Keywords: | INK CARTRID | | OK | | Cancel | 2256

HTS ID	Description
8443992210	INK CARTRIDGES FOR THE GOODS OF SUBHEADING 8443.31 AND OF PRINTER INK CA
8443992250	PARTS AND ACCESSORIES FOR THE GOODS OF SUBHEADING 8443.31 AND OF PARTS

2258

2254

FIG. 22B

2260

	HTS Value	HTS Description
	84439900	Other
▷	8443990010	Accessory and auxiliary machines which are intended for attachment to an electrostatic photocopier
	8443990090	Other
✱		

Choose Import HTS Code For Canada   ⬜◻✖

Your export code 844399 has following associated import HTS values for the destination country, CANADA. Chose the most appropriate description and the required taxes and duties will be computed.

◁ ▭ ▷

< Prev   2262   2264   Next >

FIG. 22C

2270

Summary of Taxes and Duties   ⬜◻✖

For HTS import classification 8443990010 entering CANADA, the following taxes and duties apply.

	Tax or Duty	Description	Percentage	Amount	▲
	Duty	Import Duty	4%	$8.00	
▷	Tax	Canadian VAT	2%	$4.00	
	Tax	Provincial Tax	2%	$4.00	
✱					

◁ ▭ ▷ ▽

Total Taxes and Duties $12.00

< Prev   Next >

FIG. 22D

2280

Dual Use Status	_ □ ☒

8443990010 is classified as dual-use 11% of the time based on historical data. Dual-use implies that the product can be used both for commercial and military purposes.

☑ Acknowledged

2282

2284

< Prev		Next >

FIG. 22E

2290

Entities On the US "Forbidden to Ship" List	_ □ ☒

The United States forbids shipments to the following entities in CANADA.

	Name	Person or Firm?
▸	Thieves-Are-Us	Firm
	Mondar Wonbams	Individual
	Association for Chaos	Firm
	Swifty Williams	Individual
*		

☐ I certify that this product is not being shipped to any of these entries.

< Prev		Finish

2292

2294

FIG. 22F

2295

Print   ☒

| Postage | Page Setup | Address Information | Customs Information |

For each item in your package, you must enter a description, value and country of origin to satisfy US Postal Service customs regulations. Click International Info on Postage tab for more customs information.

Customs Declaration Form
 ○ Form 2976 (CN22)   ⦿ Form 2976-A (CP72)   ○ None

Package Contents (Right click any row for options)

	Qty.		Description	Weight	Value	Export HTS	Import HTS	Country of Origin		Tax	Duty	
1	1	▾	PARTS/ACCESS FOR G	1 lbs 15 oz.	$200.00	844399	843990010	UNITED STATES	▾	$8.00	$8.00	△
2	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾	$0.00	$0.00	
3	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾	$0.00	$0.00	
4	0	▾		0 oz.	$0.00				▾	$0.00	$0.00	

◁ ‖   ▷ ▾

| Save | | Retrieve | | Clear | | Harmonize | | Instructions | | Video |

Type of Contents
 ○ Commercial Sample   ○ Gift   ○ Documents   ○ Other   ○ Returned Goods   ⦿ Merchandise

☐ Do not print separate customs form.   ☑ Fill in Postage and Fees

☑ I certify that the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct:

| Jim Johnson | (MUST be a person's name, not a company name)

| Print | | Cancel | | Help |

2296

FIG. 22G

SYSTEM AND METHOD TO PROVIDE CUSTOMS HARMONIZATION, TARIFF COMPUTATIONS, AND CENTRALIZED TARIFF COLLECTION FOR INTERNATIONAL SHIPPERS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present Patent Application is based on and claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/234,126 filed on Aug. 14, 2009, the entire content of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The systems and methods described herein generally relate to integrating an international shipping label with a customs form to provide a shipping label having postage, addressing, customs, and other information for international shipping, and in particular, to computing and managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages. Landed cost is defined herein as the end cost of an internationally shipped item. The cost includes purchase price, freight, insurance, and other costs and may sometimes include duties, tariffs and taxes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The current procedure for preparing an international package for shipping involves a number of time-consuming steps. First, the shipping label must be generated. The typical minimum amount of information is the destination address and the sender's address. Secondly, some form of United States ("US") postage must be affixed to the package. This could be conventional stamps, a postage meter strip from a conventional meter, a postage validation imprinter ("PVI") postage strip issued by a US Post Office, or digital Information Based Indicia postage ("IBI" or "PC postage"). Online postage was first described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,319,562 to Whitehouse, filed Aug. 22, 1991. A subsequent patent, U.S. Pat. No. 6,005,945 to Whitehouse, filed Mar. 20, 1997, described an extension of the online postage concept—a centralized postage system premised on Web or Telephonic Milli-Transactions. Both of these patents are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0004] Thirdly, the US Postal Service ("USPS"), along with the Universal Postal Union ("UPU") and the World Customs Organization ("WCO"), has historically required a separate and distinct customs declaration form, which must be affixed to the package. One of the simplest customs and declaration forms 10 is the PS 2976 (alternately referred to as the CN22), a representative diagram of which is shown in FIG. 1. The form 10 repeats the sender 20 and recipient 30 address information, and adds details 40 as to the contents of the package including value and classification (e.g., Gift, Sample, Documents, Other). The newer forms, such as form 60 shown in FIG. 2, include a six digit Harmonization Tariff Schedule ("HTS") export number, which represents the product to the origin country (e.g., U.S.) using an internationally-established classification system.

[0005] Form 60, referred to by USPS as PS 2976A (and also known as the CP72), is used for certain sub-classes of mail, or when package valuation exceeds $500. The data on form PS 2976A is virtually the same as that on form PS 2976 (e.g., contains sender information 70, recipient information 80,

details of contents 90, etc.), but the form is provided with multiple copies (up to five) and the format is larger.

[0006] These conventional forms are time consuming to complete, and replicate much of the data on the shipping label itself. The forms must be properly matched with the shipping label and postage, which can be problematic in a high volume shipping environment.

[0007] The right hand side of the PS 2976 (CN22) form 10 is designed to be separated and archived at the USPS, which inducts the mail. The copy is stored in a manual filing system for thirty days and then discarded. In the case of form PS 2976A (e.g., form 60), one complete copy of the form 60 is held at the origin Post Office for thirty days. The purpose of this storage is to provide some record of the induction of the mail piece. But the storage protocol is archaic and very inefficient. If information is requested for a given package, the originating Post Office must first be determined, and a manual search of the hardcopy records must then be undertaken by USPS personnel at that Post Office. The information is only retained for thirty days, which in many cases is a shorter period of time than the overall delivery cycle, particularly in the case of surface international mail subclasses which are transported by boat.

[0008] Furthermore, in addition to the issues noted above, shipments of international packages often require the payment of taxes and duties associated with processing and delivering the international packages in a foreign country, wherein the shipper or recipient must pay the taxes and duties in addition to any postage that must be paid to postal authorities in the originating country. In many instances, both the shipper and the recipient of an international package may prefer to pre-pay these international taxes and duties, as the recipient need not be present to receive the package if the taxes and duties have been pre-paid, nor does the mailer have to pay additional money on delivery.

[0009] The USPS has expressed that there is increasing certain market pressure to provide the pre-payment option to shippers that have smaller volume because competing carriers such as FedEx and UPS allow taxes and duties to pre-paid for their customers, and further because of new rules that the Postal Regulatory Commission ("PRC") has established for market dominant and competitive products, published at www.prc.gov/pre-docs/home/PAEA/FinalRulesWeb.pdf. Furthermore, shipment security rules may also drive the requirement to have shippers pre-pay the taxes and duties due on international packages.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The systems and methods described herein generally relate to integrating an international shipping label with a customs form to provide a shipping label having postage, addressing, customs, and other information for international shipping, and in particular, to managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages.

[0011] In one embodiment, a method for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system may comprise receiving a request for an international shipping label, wherein the request may include at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered. The method may further comprising generating a unique self-validating postage indicium in response to the request, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium

may indicate that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid. Furthermore, the method may comprise enabling printing of the international shipping label having the unique self-validating postage indicium printed thereon, wherein the international shipping label may further include a customs declaration form that includes the description of the contents of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

[0012] In one embodiment, an online postage system may be configured to manage landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system. In particular, the system may comprise, among other things, a postage-issuing computer system and a communications link connecting a user computer with the postage-issuing computer system. The postage-issuing computer system may be configured to receive a request for an international shipping label from the user computer. For example, the request may include at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered. The postage-issuing computer system may then generate a unique self-validating postage indicium in response to the request received from the user computer, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium may indicate that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid. The postage-issuing computer system may then enable printing of the international shipping label having the unique self-validating postage indicium printed thereon, wherein the international shipping label may further include a customs declaration form that includes the description of the contents of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

[0013] Other systems, methods, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art based on the following drawings and detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0014] FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary copy of the PS 2976 customs declaration form;

[0015] FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary copy of the PS 2976A customs declaration form;

[0016] FIG. 3 illustrates an exemplary system diagram of an online postage system configured to electronically generate an integrated shipping label and customs form, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0017] FIGS. 4-7 illustrate exemplary embodiments of an integrated shipping label and customs form, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0018] FIGS. 8-16 illustrate exemplary embodiments of a user interface that can be used to electronically generate an integrated shipping label and customs form, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0019] FIGS. 17a and 17b illustrate exemplary embodiments of a user interface that can be used to generate and integrate shipping label and customs form and calculate shipping costs and taxes and duties using Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0020] FIG. 18 illustrates an exemplary process for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0021] FIG. 19 illustrates an exemplary system for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0022] FIG. 20 illustrates an exemplary process for authenticating refund requests on an integrated shipping label and customs form, according to one aspect of the invention;

[0023] FIG. 21 illustrates an exemplary process for paying tariffs on behalf of one or more shippers, according to one aspect of the invention; and

[0024] FIGS. 22A-22G depict various windows or graphical interfaces of the shipping software for generating an integrated shipping label and customs form displayed as a dialog windows, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0025] The systems and methods described herein provide for an integrated shipping label having international shipping and customs information displayed thereon. The integrated shipping label can be used in place of the conventional shipping label and separate customs form used by a post service, such as the USPS. The integrated shipping label has a unique customs form number or other unique identifier displayed thereon (e.g., in a barcode format). The unique customs form number or other unique identifier may be unique within the postal service's system and can have any desired shipping and customs information for the package associated with it. Furthermore, the systems and methods allow for electronically storing data associated with each package shipment. The systems and methods allow for the management of a discount service on behalf of a postal service using a centralized online postage system.

[0026] In one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein can be used with the systems and methods described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,341,505, issued Aug. 23, 1994, U.S. Pat. No. 6,005,945, issued Dec. 21, 1999, U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2003/0101143, published May 29, 2003, U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2003/0101147 published May 29, 2003, and U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2003/0101148, published May 29, 2003, each of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety. Each of these patents and published patent applications, at least in part, point out the value of using tracking (or delivery confirmation) numbers on domestic USPS shipments to reduce fraud and provide a refund methodology that accounts for misprints and other events outside of the user's control. These patents and published patent applications also set forth a centralized online postage system that can be used with the systems and methods described herein.

[0027] For example, turning to FIG. 3, a computer environment in which a user may purchase online postage is shown. A user at a personal computer (PC) 11a may connect to a server computer 12 configured to enable the user to electronically purchase valid postage, typically via an Internet-type network 13. The user may interact with a software program (e.g., DAZzle by Endicia) on the personal computer 11a, which may be downloaded from the server computer 12, installed on the personal computer 11a, and/or embedded in a Web page accessible via a Web browser, which may allow the user to manage postage purchases.

[0028] Turning to FIG. 4, the USPS has a general format for "universal" shipping labels, which are shipping labels for international shipments of US origin or destination that can be generated electronically. The shipping label 400 is gener-

ally about four by six inches in size, landscape style, and includes a large capital "I" **450**, which typically has a serif font. Also included is content identification **460** (e.g., gift, document, commercial sample, etc.) and sender's instructions **470** (e.g., return to sender, abandon upon non-delivery, etc.). The label **400** can also include insurance information **480**, such as insurance number and insured amount. A printout of the label **400** is preferably four-ply, with two copies provided for a customs declaration, one for a dispatch note, and one for a customer copy. An online label record may also be provided. The online record contains the customs number and can be used for confirmation of acceptance by the USPS. The record can also be used as the proof of mailing receipt for customers who bring their items to a Post Office for postage and acceptance, whereby a Post Office copy may no longer be required because the information can be stored in a database and retained for any suitable period of time (e.g., six months).

[0029] In one embodiment, the shipping label **400** may also provide a service type (e.g., Global Priority Mail, Global Airmail, Global Economy, etc.), wherein shipping labels corresponding to each of these service types are illustrated in FIGS. **4-6**, respectively. In particular, FIG. **4** illustrates a shipping label **400** corresponding to Global Economy Parcel Post **410**, FIG. **5** illustrates a shipping label **500** corresponding to Global Airmail Parcel Post **510**, and FIG. **6** illustrates a shipping label **600** corresponding to Global Priority Mail **610**.

[0030] In one embodiment, the shipping label **400** may further include a barcode **420**, typically a Code U128 type barcode. The barcode **420** may appear above the address segment **430**, as shown in FIG. **4**, and may include a customs form tracking number (e.g., 2976A), which may uniquely identify the mail piece. In one embodiment, human readable numbers **425** may be provided below the barcode **420** to further uniquely identify the mail piece. The shipping label **400** may also include various graphics, which may be limited to a particular resolution such as two-hundred dots per inch ("dpi"), and the graphics can be provided in a graphic image file ("GIF") format, a tagged image file ("TIF") format, a portable document format ("PDF"), or any other suitable format.

[0031] In one embodiment, postage can be paid with postage stamps, postage meter stamps, PVI labels, permit imprints, or any other suitable mechanism. In one embodiment, the shipping label **400** may include a designated postage area **490** alongside the "I" **450**, which may be reserved for placement of the postage. In addition, in one embodiment, the postage placed in the area **490** may include postage marks and/or indicia generated according to the techniques described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/990,605, filed Nov. 20, 2001, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,319,562 and 5,341,505, and/or the patents and published patent applications noted above, each of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0032] FIG. **7** illustrates an integrated shipping label **700** having both customs information and postage indicia **705**, according to one embodiment. An example of an integrated shipping label is provided in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/165,647 by Harry T. Whitehouse entitled "INTEGRATED SHIPPING LABEL AND CUSTOMS FORM," filed on Jun. 23, 2005, the contents of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. The sender's address **710** and the recipient's address **720** may appear in the center of the label **700**, wherein the sender's address **710** may generally be left justified with "USA" automatically populated in bold capital letters. The

recipient's address **720** and/or destination country may also be bolded with a large font. In one embodiment, the shipping label **700** may include a two-dimensional barcode **730** representing digitally-signed data, which may include the sender's USPS meter account number, origin ZIP code, postage date, and postage amount, among other things. In one embodiment, the customs form number (or one or more significant digits from the customs form number) may also be embedded in the postage indicia **705**, thereby providing a unique identifier linked to the postage transaction. In one embodiment, a one-dimensional barcode **740** may also represent the customs form number. The one-dimensional barcode **740** may be used for tracking a package associated with the shipping label **700**. Thus, because the barcode **730** and/or the barcode **740** may include the sender's USPS meter account number, the international shipment may therefore be traced back to the relevant sender.

[0033] In one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may integrate heretofore disparate subcomponents used to ship packages from the US to foreign countries within a single, integrated label combining digital postage, addressing, and customs form information. Furthermore, the systems and methods may be used to transfer package data to a centralized and secure data storage cluster, whereby all data associated with a given package (e.g., sender, recipient, sub-class of mail, package contents, valuation, etc.) can be aggregated in an easily accessed data repository. This data can then be used to expedite the flow of goods through foreign customs operations, assist in the tracking of packages, enhance the security and safety of the common carriers transporting the packages, and assist law enforcement agencies in both the US and abroad to investigate potential criminal or terrorist activity.

[0034] The ability to produce such a shipping label also represents a tremendous time savings for international shippers because the addressing, postage payment, and customs form preparation may be integrated. These systems and methods can also be extended to manage postage discount programs, which are common in the United States for certain sub-classes of international mail. Discount programs managed via the embodiments described herein can be administered at lower costs and reduce USPS financial losses by eliminating induction accounting errors and omissions that are common with permit-based mailing programs.

[0035] The systems and methods described herein may further leverage the features of a centralized online postage system, such as that described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,005,945 incorporated by reference above, which allows for the real-time capture of data associated with a postage transaction. Mailing software utilized by the online postage system can be implemented to allow a user to generate an integrated label **700** having the addressee information, the appropriate postage, and customs information. An exemplary graphical user interface **800** for such mailing software is shown in FIG. **8**. For example, in one embodiment, the user interface **800** may include a workspace **810** that allows a user to design an integrated label **700**. The user interface **800** may further include a toolbar **805** that provides tools such as "save," enabling a user to save a design on a non-volatile memory, and "file open," enabling the user to open the saved design. Also included may be an "address book" **815** tool, enabling the user to store a plurality of addresses that can be readily merged with the designed shipping label **700**.

[0036] In one embodiment, the mailing software may further include a helper screen **900**, as shown in FIG. **9**, which may be configured to assist the user in determining the correct amount of international postage, import restrictions to the foreign country, and customs form requirements for the shipping label **700**, among other things. As shown in FIG. **9a**, the helper screen **900** may provide a user with a plurality of tools to establish postage rates for an international location, such as Italy **910**. The screen **900** may allow a user to establish postage type **920** (e.g., airmail, high priority, etc.) and weight **930**. The postage rate may then be calculated based on the user's established information. Also included may be tools for restrictions **940**, prohibitions **935**, observations **945**, customs forms **950**, areas served **930**, and express mail service **970**.

[0037] Turning to FIG. **9b**, the prohibitions tool **935** of the user interface **900** is shown. The tool **935** may show a list of goods **936** prohibited for mailing to a particular country (e.g., France). Turning to FIG. **9c**, the restrictions tool **940** of the user interface is shown. The tool **940** may show a list of restrictions **941** that apply to mail to a particular country (e.g., France). This information may generally be provided by the destination country and disseminated by the USPS to international shippers. Although this information has historically been available in printed catalogs, the information has recently been made available electronically as well. As such, in one embodiment, the user interface **900** may utilize the electronic prohibitions and restrictions information.

[0038] Turning to FIG. **10**, the mailing software may include another user interface **1000** for establishing and printing an integrated shipping label **700**. The user interface **1000** may allow a user to establish postage type **1045**, weight **1047**, date **1049**, track option **1051**, insurance **1055**, and value **1057**. The user interface **1000** may also allow a user to purchase the postage **1061**, international rates **1065**, and print a test label **1067**. The user interface **1000** may further allow a user to provide package information **1059**, such as a package description. Other tools within this user interface may include page setup **1026**, address information **1030**, and customs information **1040**.

[0039] Turning to FIG. **11**, the customs information **1040** tool of the print user interface **1000** is shown. The customs information tool **1040** may allow a user to select the proper form **1100**, provide a description of the contents **1110**, and select the type of contents **1120** (e.g., sample, gift, document, other, etc.).

[0040] By using the postage indicia **705** described above in the universal shipping labels **700**, which may be generated by the online postage system described above, each label printed can have an associated data record stored at a central location. In the case of domestic packages, the data may include the complete destination address, complete sender information, tracking or delivery confirmation number, package weight, postage applied, and mail class (e.g., Priority). In the case of an international package, the data may be expanded to include a description of contents, the value of the contents, and the country of origin for the goods. Further, all of this data may be indexed by a unique identifier (i.e., the customs form number).

[0041] This approach may alleviate the need for the thirty day storage of a customs form hardcopy at the origin Post Office. In the existing system, if the information is needed, the origin Post Office must be located, contacted, and a manual search for the information must be instituted. These systems and methods provide a simple index lookup procedure, which

can be accessed over the Internet (e.g., via a Web browser). By simply entering a unique identifier (e.g., the customs form number), data about the sender, the package shipped by the sender, and/or status of the package may be retrieved. This type of information can then be used by customs personnel (in the US and foreign countries), air transportation coordinators, and law enforcement to further advance the safety of commercial shipping.

[0042] To achieve some measure of standardization in customs-related information globally, the Universal Postal Union ("UPU") has developed a numerical "harmonization" table, which maps products into numerical Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes. The US and other countries have been moving towards requiring shippers to provide both product description and HTS codes as part of the customs form information. However, the HTS code requirement may create a burden on those unfamiliar with the codes. As such, in one embodiment, the mailing software may further include a lookup mechanism that allows the appropriate HTS code to be determined (e.g., user interface **1200** shown in FIG. **12a**). In one embodiment, the user interface **1200** may provide a text box **1210** that allows a user to perform a text-based search for the proper HTS code, which may be provided in a list box **1220**. For example, typing the words "cotton" and "shirt" in the text box **1210** may result in a Boolean search through the HTS database to find all occurrences of the words "cotton" and "shirt." Note that customs organizations make a distinction between cotton shirts and shirts made of other materials, for example. Similarly, there may be a distinction between men shirts, women's shirts, and night shirts, while wheeled toys may be considered distinct from general toys, among other distinctions.

[0043] This simplified lookup process can be integrated into the mailing software when a user is filling out the contents descriptions for the customs form. In this way, the user can select among standardized descriptive text defined within the harmonization table, rather than having to typing in free-form (and potentially incorrect or vague) information. Alternatively, the lookup process may be used as an adjunct or an option to a free-form goods description. Recording contents data by HTS code rather than free-form text may also have benefits in reducing the data storage requirements for historical shipment information stored at the centralized postage server site.

[0044] Turning back to FIGS. **9b** and **9c**, the list of prohibited goods **936** and restricted goods **941** may pose difficulty for a user attempting to compare the list to the description of the actual item being shipped by the user. An approach to alleviate this task may include recasting the lists **936** and **941** into a corresponding HTS code or a corresponding Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) number. For example, radioactive materials **937** in the list of prohibited goods **936** may correspond to HTS number 28444000. Turning to FIG. **12b**, the user interface **1200** is shown with a search performed for "radioactive" materials **1230**. The search results **1240** may reveal that only one HTS number corresponds with such type of goods. Also shown is a search performed for "bees" **1250**. In this case, the search results **1255** may reveal multiple entries. Any of these entries may trigger a warning message to the user, instructing the user that there restrictions/prohibitions are in place for such type of goods being sent to the desired country.

[0045] If the prohibitions and restrictions are cast in terms of HTS numbers for each country, the mailing software can

enforce the prohibitions and issue warnings for restricted items. This can be achieved by requiring that descriptions be selected from a searchable HTS list and not typed free-form, and the selected HTS numbers could then be compared to the list of restricted and prohibited HTS numbers for the country of interest. The software can provide a hard lock-out to prevent the user from printing the shipping label and accompanying customs form or issue warning messages of varying severity. Alternatively or in addition, for example, the mailing software can open a window in the graphical user interface stating "WARNING! ITEM NOT AUTHORIZED FOR SHIPPING TO SELECTED COUNTRY."

[0046] In addition to prohibiting or restricting particular goods from being shipped to a specific destination country, the mailing software may further present the shipper via a graphical user interface a list of individuals or organizations in a given country who have been designated as "no-ship" entities by an authority of an originating country (e.g., the US Department of Commerce or the US Homeland Security Department). When the shipper attempts to ship to a "no-ship" individual or "no-ship" organization, the mailing software can alert the shipper and/or prevent the shipper from generating a shipping label for the goods.

[0047] In one embodiment, the mailing software may further alert the shipper and/or merchant as to goods which are classified as "dual-use" and thus may have export restrictions. "dual-use" items are items that can be used for commercial and military purposes. For example, a personal computer can be classified as a "dual-use" item. In which case, the shipper may have to certify by acknowledging that the goods being shipped (e.g., the personal computer) are not intended for military purposes, for example, by checking a designated area in the graphical interface of the mailing software.

[0048] There are a number of advantages in an international shipping system that fundamentally operates using the HTS numbers. First, language barriers are eliminated at foreign customs operations. For example, a Bulgarian customs official may not be very well versed in English, but the official will know the international HTS numbers relevant to Bulgaria intimately.

[0049] Second, the use of HTS numbers offers the shipper an automated software-based mechanism to insure that restricted or prohibited goods are not inadvertently being shipped to foreign countries. For such goods, there is no guarantee that the goods will be returned to the shipper. Thirdly, the use of HTS numbers may provide a convenient and uniform way to construct electronic manifests of what goes on any aircraft of ship. This may be significant depending on the current geo-political situation.

[0050] As described above, the online postage system can transmit the detailed list of items (including HTS number) about a shipment to both the central postage services and those of the USPS using the customs form number as an index for this detailed data. Thus, scanning a customs form barcode created by the systems described above may allow for an instantaneous lookup of all the items in that package, including the HTS number for each item.

[0051] In one embodiment, mailing software utilized by the online postage system can be implemented to allow a user to generate a shipping label and customs declaration form 1300, such as a CP 72 form, as shown in FIG. 13. The customs declaration form may include information such as sender information 1370, recipient information 1380, details of contents 1390, and HTS code 1395.

[0052] Turning to FIG. 14, the mailing software may include a user interface 1400 for establishing and printing shipping label and customs declaration form 1300. The user interface 1400 may allow a user to establish postage type 1445, postage class 1446, weight 1447, ship date 1449, track option 1451, insurance 1455, and value 1457. The user interface 1400 may also allow a user to purchase the postage 1461, international rates 1465, and print a test label 1467. The user interface 1400 may further allow a user to provide package information 1459, such as a package description. Other tools within this user interface may include page setup 1426, address information 1430, and customs information 1440.

[0053] Turning to FIG. 15, the customs information tool 1440 of the user interface 1400 is shown. The customs information tool 1440 may allow a user to select the proper form 1500, provide a description of the contents 1510, select the type of contents 1520 (e.g., sample, gift, document, other, etc.), certify the customs declaration is correct 1530, and fill in postage and fees. In providing a description of the contents 1510, a user may provide HTS IDs, or HTS codes, in a "HTS ID" field 1515 and an associated description in a "Description" field 1516. The customs information tool 1440 may allow a user to save 1511, retrieve 1512, and clear 1513 data relating to the description of the contents 1510. In addition, a user may view instructions 1518 and video 1519. The customs information tool may allow a user to harmonize 1517.

[0054] Turning to FIG. 16, to harmonize 1517 (shown in FIG. 15), user interface 1600 may provide a text box 1610 that allows a user to perform a text-based search for the proper HTS code, which may be provided in a list box 1620. For example, typing the word "HATS" in the text box 1610 may result in a search through the HTS database to find all occurrences of the word "HATS." The user interface 1600 allows a user to select a particular line 1630 corresponding to a particular user-desired HTS code 1640. The particular user-desired HTS code 1640 may have an associated description 1650.

[0055] Turning to FIG. 17a, in one embodiment, if a user selects a particular HTS code in user interface 1600, the selected HTS ID 1640 may be provided automatically to the HTS ID field 1515. The associated description 1650 also may be provided automatically to the Description field 1516.

[0056] In another embodiment, as shown in FIG. 17b, two types of HTS codes can be retrieved from the HTS database. A first type of HTS code is an Export HTS code 1640A and a second type of HTS code is an Import HTS code 1640B. An Export HTS code is an HTS code that is established for the exporting country and an Import HTS code is an HTS code established for the importing country. For example, if goods 1516 are shipped from United States to France, the goods 1516 are assigned an HTS Export code 1640A in the US and an HTS Import code 1640B in France. For example, as shown in FIG. 17b, in the goods description field 1651 "sugar confection" is assigned Export HTS code "170490" and Import HTS code "17049007." In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. 7b, the Export HTS code and Import HTS code are the same up to the first six digits. However, the HTS Import code contains additional digits and these additional digits change according to the destination country receiving the shipment. The Export HTS code 1640A is presented or sent to the originating country export authority when processing the shipment of the goods. The Export HTS code 1640A is used by the originating or exporting country (e.g., US) to allow customs of the originating country and department of com-

merce (in the case of US) to record what is going out of the country (e.g., what is going out of the US). The Import HTS code **1640**B assigned to the importing or destination country (e.g., France) is used to compute taxes and duties. For example, in the above case where "sugar confection" is shipped from US to France the shipping software computes the Tax and Duty (respectively, $6.20 and $0.00) automatically using the Import HTS code.

[0057] In one embodiment the process of selecting the proper customs form, the description for the goods to be shipped and the determining of the HTS values (including Import and Export HTS values) and the calculating of corresponding duties and taxes is performed using a flow of sequence of graphical user interfaces or windows (dialog window sequence) for guiding the shipper to enter appropriate input data or parameter or select from a menu an appropriate entry.

[0058] FIG. **22**A shows the customs information window **2240**, according one embodiment of the present invention. The customs information window **2240** may allow a user to select the proper customs form by clicking on button **2242**. The user can then select a first row **2244** within "package content" window **2246** and for example input quantity "1". The user does not need to input any description of the goods to be shipped in the first row yet. By pressing on "Harmonize" button **2244** while on the first row, the user is presented with a new window or graphical user **2250** interface labeled "Harmonization Code" or "Export Harmonization Code" or any other label as may be appropriate.

[0059] FIG. **22**B shows an example of the "Harmonization Code" window **2250**, according to an embodiment of the present invention. The "Harmonization Code" window **2250** can be retrieved by the shipping software from a local memory of the user's personal computer or can also be retrieved by the shipping software from the world wide web. Window **2250** allows the user to look up a harmonization code for a corresponding product or goods to be shipped. For example, the user may enter the words "ink cartridge" within space **2252**. The shipping software dynamically searches for product description containing the words "ink cartridge" as the user types the keywords. The user is presented with a list of products or product descriptions **2254** that contain the typed keyword "ink cartridge." The user can then select one description from the list **2254** that matches as closely as possible with the products or goods the user is shipping. For example, the user can select "Ink Cartridges for the Goods of Subheading 8443.31 and of Printer" at **2256**. Next to each description of the product is also listed the Export HTS code **2258** associated with the product. For example, the Export HTS code "844399" is associated with "Ink Cartridges for the Goods of Subheading 8443.31 and of Printer" selected by the user as being the product being shipped. As stated in the above paragraphs, the Export HTS code is an HTS code that is established for the exporting country (for example, in this case the US). Once the user has selected the appropriate product description **2256** and associated Export HTS code **2258** for the goods the user is shipping, the user can then click on button "OK" **2259** or double click on the desired product description **2256**. When printing the shipping label, only the Export HTS code is required by the United States Postal Service as the Export HTS code is used by the originating or exporting country (e.g., in this case the US) to keep track of the goods that are being exported.

[0060] However, a more detailed HTS code or an Import HTS code is used by the importing country to determine the appropriate duties and taxes. For example, if the user intends to ship the goods to Canada, a look up table or database of HTS codes that is used by the destination or importing country (in this example Canada) can be used to determine the appropriate Import HTS code.

[0061] FIG. **22**C shows a graphical user interface or window **2260** for allowing a user to select an appropriate Import HTS code associated with the Export HTS code **2258** (e.g., "844399") from a list of Import HTS codes **2262**. The user is presented with a list of possible product descriptions **2264** from which the user can select the product description that corresponds as closely as possible to the goods the user is shipping to Canada. For example, the user can select "Accessory and auxiliary machines which are intended for attachment to an electrostatic photocopier . . . " and the associated Import HTS code "8443990010." The shipping software can then compute the appropriate taxes and duties based on the selected Import HTS code for the destination country Canada. In one embodiment, this is performed by accessing the database for taxes and duties of the destination country (e.g., in this example Canada). The database can be locally stored at the user's personal computer or stored remotely and accessed via a world wide web service. The Import HTS code and the computed duties and taxes for that Import HTS code are summarized in a table shown in window **2270**. For example, for the Import HTS code "8443990010" selected by the user the taxes and duties are computed and provided in table **2270**. The Import duty is computed using the ongoing 4% rate in Canada and the Canadian VAT tax and Canadian Provincial tax are computed using the ongoing rates of 2%. It is noted that depending on the destination country there may be more than one type of tax that can be levied. Based on a purchase value or assigned value of the product to be shipped (e.g., $200) and the percentage rates for the import duties and taxes, the amount of the duties and taxes are computed (e.g., respectively $8.00, $4.00 and $4.00) and the total taxes and duties is calculated by adding all the taxes and duties (e.g., $12.00).

[0062] After calculating the total duties and taxes, the user can click on the button "Next" at **2272** to further advance the shipping software to a next step. Upon clicking on the button "Next" at **2272**, a window or graphical user interface **2280** pertaining to "dual use status" is displayed.

[0063] FIG. **22**E shows an example of the "Dual Use Status" window **2280**, according to one embodiment of the present invention. The "dual use status" window **2280** alerts the user as to goods which are classified as "dual-use" and thus may have export restrictions. "Dual Use Status" items are items that can be used for commercial and military purposes. For example, in the present case, the product with an Import HTS code of "8443990010" is classified as dual-use 11% of the time based on historical data. In which case, the user is prompted to acknowledge that the ink cartridge is classified as a "dual-use" item by checking box **2282**. After acknowledging the "Dual Use Status" of the item, the use can click on button "Next" **2284** to advance the shipping software to a next step.

[0064] After clicking on button "Next" **2284**, the shipping software can open another window **2290** to alert the user about entities in the destination country (e.g., Canada) which the US (e.g., Homeland Security Department, Department of Commerce, etc.) are classified in the "Forbidden to Ship" or "no-ship" list. In order to move forward, the user must certify

that the product or goods being shipped is/are not being shipped to any of the listed entities in the destination country. This certification can be performed, for example, by clicking or checking box **2292**. Once this certification is done, the user can then click on button "Finish" **2294** so that the software displays a summary window **2295**. If the user attempts to click on button "Finish" **2294** without first certifying that the product will not be shipped to any of the listed "no-ship" entities, the shipping software will not be able to advance and the summary window **2295** will not be displayed.

[0065] FIG. **22G** is window or graphical user interface summarizing the various input parameters described in the above paragraphs such as the description of the goods or product being shipped, the quantity of the product, the weight of the product, the value of the product, the Import and Export HTS codes, the country of origin (e.g., US), the amounts of taxes and duties computed by the shipping software and the type of customs form used (e.g., Form 2976-A), and any other pertinent data, according to an embodiment of the present invention. The user can verify the data before generating and printing the customs forms by clicking on the button "Print" **2296**.

[0066] Turning to FIG. **18**, an exemplary process is illustrated for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages. In particular, the process illustrated in FIG. **18** may be performed at the online postage system described in further detail above, wherein the online postage system may receive a request for an international shipping label in block **1810**. For example, in one embodiment, a shipper may provide the request for the international shipping label to the online postage system using the mailing software described above, wherein the request may include at least information relating to the shipper (e.g., an origin address and ZIP code, a USPS meter account number, etc.) in addition to a recipient of a package that will bear the international shipping label (e.g., a destination address and country).

[0067] Furthermore, in one embodiment, the request received at the online postage system in block **1810** may further include a description of contents for the package that will bear the international shipping label and an estimated value for the contents. The online postage system may maintain a database containing various HTS codes (including Export HTS codes and Import HTS codes) that correspond to various different product types and a master list of tariff numbers corresponding to the Import HTS codes for various different countries. The database may be maintained as a SQL server for example. For example, the online postage system may populate the database with the Export and Import HTS codes based on the numerical harmonization table developed by the UPU, as described above, and may further populate the database with the master list of tariff numbers using data maintained by the International Customs Tariffs Bureau. Thus, in one embodiment, the online postage system may search the database in block **1820** to obtain one or more international HTS codes (Export HTS codes and Import HTS codes) corresponding to one or more products that match the description of the contents (e.g., using an XML request or other database transaction). For example, the shipper may provide one or more search terms and/or free-form text describing the contents of the international package, wherein block **1820** may include the online postage system querying the database (e.g., using a Boolean search) to obtain the corresponding HTS codes (Export HTS codes and Import HTS codes).

[0068] In one embodiment, the online postage system may then further query the HTS database (i.e., retrieve the Import HTS code from the database) in block **1830** to calculate an estimate for taxes and duties, including any taxes and duties that can be pre-paid, for the international package to be shipped to the destination country (e.g., France) identified in the label request. In one embodiment, because the international taxes and duties for the package may differ depending on the particular contents of the package and the particular destination country, the database may have a primary index based on country (e.g., country name, country code, etc.) and a secondary index based on the Import HTS codes in the harmonization table. As such, to calculate the estimated taxes and duties in block **1830**, the online postage system may map the Import HTS codes obtained for the contents in block **1820** to the relevant tariff schedule, wherein the tariff schedule may represent the tariffs, taxes, and other duties for shipping international packages in terms of valuation for such contents. For example, the tariffs, taxes, and other duties may generally be represented as a number of currency units per currency units of valuation, which may further differ for the various HTS codes (e.g., a number of dollars per $100 valuation for contents corresponding to a certain HTS code). Thus, the estimated taxes and duties calculated in block **1830** may be a function of the destination country, the Import HTS codes corresponding to the contents, the value of the contents, the origin country of the shipper, and/or the origin country of the goods. It should be appreciated that the function of querying the database in block **1830** to calculate an estimate for taxes and duties may be implemented in a separate stand-alone system independent of the online postage system. For example, an XML request to a dedicated "tariff" server could send data relating to the destination country, the Import HTS codes corresponding to the contents for the destination country, the value of the contents, the origin country of the shipper, and/or the origin country of the goods. In response to the request, a user could receive a return message with estimated taxes and duties, including estimated taxes and duties that can be pre-paid.

[0069] In one embodiment, in response to calculating the estimated taxes and duties for the international package in block **1830**, the online postage system may collect the appropriate fees for the international shipping label from the shipper in block **1840**. In particular, the fees may generally include a cost for postage in the origin country and the destination country (including any insurance or other costs), and may further include the estimated taxes and duties calculated in block **1830**. In one embodiment, the fees collected in block **1840** may further include a surcharge or service fee for enabling the shipper to pre-pay all of the postage, taxes, and duties required for the international package (e.g., a percentage surcharge on the estimated taxes and duties, a flat per-package service fee, etc.). As such, to collect the fees, block **1840** may include the online postage system billing the shipper in any appropriate manner. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system may bill the shipper at periodic intervals for a sum total of all transactions entered into during a prior month or other period, deducting the fees from a postage balance for the shipper maintained at the online postage system, billing a credit card for the surcharge or service fee on a per-transaction basis, or in any other suitable manner, as will be apparent.

[0070] In another embodiment, instead of the online postage system collecting the appropriate fees for the interna-

tional shipping label from the shipper in block **1840** (e.g., collecting among other costs the estimated taxes and duties), i.e., the user pre-pay for the taxes and duties, the online postage system simply indicates to the shipper the amount the shipper is expected to pay for the taxes and duties. If the taxes and duties are not collect at the time of generating the international shipping label, the destination country will collect the taxes and duties at final delivery of the shipment from the recipient.

[0071] Furthermore, various different countries may use brokers that work with local customs agencies to collect the appropriate taxes and duties for international packages, wherein the brokers typically require shippers to provide financial backup in addition to any pre-paid taxes and duties (e.g., to account for contingencies whereby the customs agencies rates the actual taxes and duties higher than the pre-paid estimate, the shipper inadvertently or intentionally misclassifies the contents of the package, etc.). As such, in one embodiment, collecting the fees in block **1840** may further include requiring the shipper to provide an acknowledgement in which the shipper agrees to further pay the online postage system any additional fees and/or duties that may subsequently be required to effect delivery of the international package. For example, in one embodiment, the mailing software may include a check box or other feature that requires the shipper to provide the acknowledgement in order to request an international shipping label indicating that taxes and duties have been pre-paid for the contents of the package that will bear the international shipping label. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the online postage system may install various auditing controls to track the HTS codes (Export HTS codes and Import HTS codes) and valuation data used to calculate the estimated taxes and duties for various shippers to detect potential and/or actual occurrences of fraud or abuse (e.g., when certain shippers consistently misclassify the contents and/or the valuation of the contents, the shippers may be disqualified from pre-paying taxes and duties temporarily or permanently, assigned a probationary status, etc.).

[0072] In one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper in block **1840**, the online postage system may enable the shipper to print the international shipping label in block **1850**. For example, as described in further detail above, the online postage system may generate a unique self-validating postage indicia or marking or symbol and a unique customs form number linked to a transaction associated with the international shipping label to indicate that landed cost for delivering the package containing the goods to the destination country have been pre-paid. In one embodiment, the marking or symbol can be of any type alphanumeric or drawing (e.g., an eagle, a maple leaf, etc.), picture, or a barcode, or a combination of these markings or symbols. The marking or symbol can be printed with visible or invisible ink. The shipper may print an integrated shipping label and customs form having the unique self-validating postage indicia or marking or symbol and the unique customs form number printed thereon. As such, in addition to the integrated shipping label having a customs declaration form that provides a description and an estimated value for the contents of the package having the integrated shipping label affixed thereto, the integrated shipping label and customs form may further indicate that postage, taxes, duties, and other costs have been pre-paid for the package. Furthermore, in one embodiment, a round stamp and/or a certification signature may be electronically printed

on the integrated shipping label and customs form, as described in further detail below, whereby the integrated shipping label and customs form may be printed in a manner that complies with all of the requirements to deliver an international package to a foreign country. Thus, the shipper may then simply deliver the international package to any appropriate postal authority in any suitable manner to ship the international package. In the case of pre-paying for taxes and duties, the destination country shipping organization (e.g., postal service at the destination foreign country) when detecting that taxes and duties have been pre-paid (for example by detecting the presence of the symbol or mark) will simply deliver the package containing the goods to the intended recipient without collecting any taxes or duties from the recipient.

[0073] In one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper in block **1840**, the online postage system further may send data relating to the transaction associated with the international shipping label to the appropriate postal authorities in block **1860**, wherein the data may be sent to the appropriate postal authorities on a daily basis, weekly basis, or any other suitable basis. In one embodiment, the data sent to the appropriate postal authorities may relate to pre-paid and collected funds for taxes and duties associated with packages designated for delivery to certain foreign countries, and may further relate to specific transactions associated with the packages for which the taxes and duties have been pre-paid and collected. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system may receive electronic manifests that describe the specific package transactions using techniques described in further detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/165,636, filed Jun. 23, 2005, entitled "Tracking Recordation System for Packages," the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0074] As such, in one embodiment, the online postage system may use the electronic manifests to generate various records linking specific package transactions with corresponding pre-paid taxes and duties, whereby the records may be referenced to determine quantities of funds to be sent to certain foreign countries. Thus, block **1860** may include sending the relevant funds to the USPS, international postal services, foreign postal services, customs agencies, or any other suitable entity, as will be apparent (e.g., the online postage system may send the funds to the USPS, which then delivers the funds to the appropriate international or foreign authorities, or the online postage system may send the funds directly to the appropriate international or foreign authorities). In addition, block **1860** may further include sending the supporting package transaction data obtained from the electronic manifests to the USPS, international postal services, foreign postal services, customs agencies, or other suitable entities, whereby the appropriate customs or postal authorities may identify the specific packages that have pre-paid taxes and duties (e.g., in response to scanning a customs barcode printed on a shipping label affixed to a particular package that is linked to a particular transaction in which the taxes and duties were pre-paid).

[0075] Accordingly, when the packages that have pre-paid taxes and duties arrive at an International Service Center (ISC), the ISC may segregate such packages for expedited dispatch.

[0076] In one embodiment, sending the data to the appropriate postal authorities in block **1860** may enable the USPS

and/or the appropriate ISC to similarly segregate packages bearing international shipping labels created using the techniques described herein (e.g., in response to scanning the customs barcodes printed on the international shipping labels and determining that such barcodes are linked to package transactions that have pre-paid taxes, duties, and other landed costs).

[0077] Additionally, in one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper in block **1840**, the online postage system further may send a notification to the recipient of the international package associated with the international shipping label in block **1870**. For example in one embodiment, the shipper may optionally provide an e-mail address or other information that can be used to notify the recipient of the international package in the request received in operation **1810**. Accordingly, the online postage system may send an e-mail or other suitable notification to the recipient in block **1870** to indicate that the package has been shipped. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system may determine whether an induction scan has occurred for the international package using techniques described in further detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/165,636, which is incorporated by reference above, wherein the notification may be sent to the recipient in block **1870** in response to the induction scan. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the notification sent to the recipient in block **1870** may further indicate that the shipper has pre-paid the taxes and duties for the international package, whereby the package can be delivered even if the recipient is not present to formally receive the package.

[0078] In one embodiment, the online postage system may send data relating to the transaction associated with the international shipping label to one or more authorities within the international postal system, such as customs agencies of one or more countries, in block **1880**. The data may include Import HTS codes, content descriptions, and/or tracking numbers. The one or more authorities may receive the data days before the package arrives. In one embodiment, the data relating to multiple transactions may be indexed according to tracking numbers. By using tracking numbers as the index, the one or more authorities can pre-identify packages requiring and not requiring inspection, allowing personnel of the one or more authorities to more efficiently inspect packages and allows packages not requiring inspection to exit the customs process more quickly.

[0079] Turning to FIG. **19**, an exemplary system is illustrated for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages. In particular, the system illustrated in FIG. **19** may generally be configured to perform the method illustrated in FIG. **18**, wherein an online postage system **1910** may receive a request for an international shipping label from a shipper computer **1950**. In one embodiment, a shipper at the shipper computer **1950** may provide the request for the international shipping label to the online postage system **1910** using the mailing software described above. For example, the shipper computer **1950** may communicate the request to the online postage system **1910** over a network **1940**, with the request then being received at the online postage system **1910** over a communications link **1930** that connects the online postage system **1910** and the shipper computer **1950** over the network **1940**.

[0080] In one embodiment, the request received at the online postage system **1910** may generally include at least information relating to the shipper (e.g., an origin address and ZIP code, a USPS meter account number, etc.) in addition to a recipient of a package that will bear the international shipping label (e.g., a destination address and country). Furthermore, in one embodiment, the request received at the online postage system **1910** may further include a description of contents for the package that will bear the international shipping label and an estimated value for the contents. The online postage system **1910** may maintain a database **1920** containing information that may be used to determine landed costs and harmonization codes for the package that will bear the international shipping label. In particular, as noted above, the database **1920** may include various HTS codes that correspond to various different product types and a master list of tariff numbers corresponding to the HTS codes for various different countries.

[0081] In one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may populate the database **1920** with the HTS codes (Import HTS codes and Export HTS codes) based on the numerical harmonization table developed by one or more postal authorities **1970** such as the UPU, and may further populate the database **1920** with the master list of tariff numbers using data maintained by one or more postal authorities **1970** such as the International Customs Tariffs Bureau. Thus, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may search the database **1920** to obtain one or more international HTS codes (Import HTS codes and Export HTS codes) corresponding to one or more products that match the description of the contents in the request received from the shipper computer **1950** (e.g., using an XML request or other database transaction). For example, the shipper at the shipper computer **1950** may provide one or more search terms and/or free-form text describing the contents of the international package to the online postage system **1910**, which may then query the database **1920** (e.g., using a Boolean search) to obtain the HTS codes (Import HTS codes and Export HTS codes) corresponding to the search terms and/or the free-form text describing the contents of the international package.

[0082] In one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may then further query the database **1920** to calculate estimated taxes and duties that the shipper can pre-pay for the international package to be shipped to the destination country identified in the label request. In one embodiment, because the international taxes and duties for the package may differ depending on the particular contents of the package and the particular destination country, the database **1920** may be primarily indexed based on country (e.g., country name, country code, etc.) and secondarily indexed based on the HTS codes (Import HTS codes) in the harmonization table. As such, to calculate the estimated taxes and duties, the online postage system **1910** may map the Import HTS codes obtained from the database **1920** to the relevant tariff schedule maintained in the database **1920**. For example, the tariff schedule may generally represent the tariffs, taxes, and other duties for shipping international packages in terms of valuation for such contents (e.g., a number of currency units per currency units of valuation, which may further differ for the various different Import HTS codes). Thus, the estimated taxes and duties that the online postage system **1910** calculates may be determined as a function of the destination country, the Import HTS codes for the contents, the value of the contents, the origin country of the shipper, and/or the origin country of the goods. As noted in the above paragraphs, the Export HTS codes are used by the originating country to simply tabulate or record the goods that have been exported and are not used per se to

compute the taxes and duties. The Import HTS codes on the other hand, which contain more digits and are specific to the destination country, are used to compute the taxes and duties for the goods that shipped.

[0083] In one embodiment, in response to calculating the estimated taxes and duties for the international package, the online postage system **1910** may collect the appropriate fees for the international shipping label from the shipper at the shipper computer **1920**. In particular, the fees may generally include a cost for postage in the origin country and the destination country (including any insurance or other costs), and may further include the estimated taxes and duties calculated by the online postage system **1910**. In one embodiment, the fees collected by the online postage system **1910** may further include a surcharge or service fee for enabling the shipper to pre-pay all of the postage, taxes, and duties required for the international package (e.g., a percentage surcharge on the estimated taxes and duties, a flat per-package service fee, etc.). As such, to collect the fees, the online postage system **1910** may bill the shipper in any appropriate manner. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may bill the shipper at periodic intervals for a sum total of all transactions entered into during a prior month or other period, deducting the fees from a postage balance for the shipper maintained at the online postage system **1910**, billing a credit card for the surcharge or service fee on a per-transaction basis, or in any other suitable manner, as will be apparent.

[0084] Furthermore, postal authorities **1970** in various different countries may use brokers that work with local customs agencies to collect the appropriate taxes and duties for international packages, wherein the brokers typically require shippers to provide financial backup in addition to any pre-paid taxes and duties (e.g., to account for contingencies whereby the customs agencies rates the actual taxes and duties higher than the pre-paid estimate, the shipper inadvertently or intentionally misclassifies the contents of the package, etc.). As such, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may further require the shipper to provide an acknowledgement in which the shipper agrees to further pay the online postage system **1910** any additional fees and/or duties that may subsequently be required to effect delivery of the international package. For example, in one embodiment, the mailing software at the shipper computer **1950** may be arranged to display a check box or other visual feature that the shipper must check or otherwise acknowledge in order to request an international shipping label with pre-paid taxes and duties. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may include various auditing controls to track the HTS codes and valuation data used to calculate the estimated taxes and duties for various shippers to detect potential and/or actual occurrences of fraud or abuse (e.g., when certain shippers consistently misclassify the contents and/or the valuation of the contents, the shippers may be disqualified from pre-paying taxes and duties temporarily or permanently, assigned a probationary status, etc.).

[0085] In one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper, the online postage system **1910** may enable the shipper computer **1950** to print the international shipping label on a printer **1960** coupled to the shipper computer **1950**. For example, as described in further detail above, the online postage system **1910** may generate a unique self-validating postage indicia and a unique customs form number linked to a transaction associated with the international shipping label or marking or

symbol and a unique customs form number linked to a transaction associated with the international shipping label to indicate that landed cost for delivering the package containing the goods to the destination country have been pre-paid. In one embodiment, the marking or symbol can be of any type alphanumeric or drawing (e.g., an eagle, a maple leaf, etc.) or a barcode, or a combination of these markings or symbols. The marking or symbol can be printed with visible or invisible ink. The shipper computer **1950** may use the printer **1960** to print an integrated shipping label and customs form having the unique self-validating postage indicia and the unique customs form number printed thereon. As such, in addition to the integrated shipping label having a customs declaration form that provides a description and an estimated value for the contents of the package having the integrated shipping label affixed thereto, the printer **1960** may print the integrated shipping label and customs form in a manner that further indicates that postage, taxes, duties, and other costs have been pre-paid for the package. Furthermore, in one embodiment, a round stamp and/or a certification signature may be electronically printed on the integrated shipping label and customs form, whereby the integrated shipping label and customs form may be printed in a manner that complies with all of the requirements to deliver an international package to a foreign country. Thus, the shipper may then simply print the integrated international shipping label using the printer **1960**, affix the international shipping label to the international package, and then suitably deliver the international package to any appropriate postal authority **1970** to effect shipment for the international package.

[0086] In one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper, the online postage system **1910** may further send data relating to the transaction associated with the international shipping label to the appropriate postal authorities **1970**, wherein the data may be sent to the appropriate postal authorities **1970** on a daily basis, weekly basis, or any other suitable basis. In one embodiment, the data sent to the postal authorities **1970** may relate to funds that have been pre-paid and collected for taxes and duties associated with certain packages designated for delivery to certain foreign countries, and may further relate to specific transactions associated with the packages for which the taxes and duties have been pre-paid and collected. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may receive electronic manifests that describe the specific package transactions using techniques described in further detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/165,636, filed Jun. 23, 2005, entitled "Tracking Recordation System for Packages," the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0087] As such, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may use the electronic manifests to generate various records linking specific package transactions with corresponding pre-paid taxes and duties, whereby the records may be referenced to determine quantities of funds to be sent to postal authorities **1970** in certain foreign countries. For example, the online postage system **1910** may send the relevant funds to postal authorities **1970** that include the USPS, international postal services, foreign postal services, customs agencies, or any other suitable entity, as will be apparent (e.g., the online postage system may **1910** send the funds to postal authorities **1970** at the USPS, which may then deliver the funds to the appropriate international or foreign postal authorities **1970**, or the online postage system **1910** may

11

alternatively send the funds directly to the appropriate international or foreign postal authorities **1970**). The present system provides the benefit that the collected funds are sent to the international or foreign authority prior to the foreign authority processing the goods for shipment to the intended recipient. This eliminates the hassle for the foreign authority (postal service, customs agency, etc.) to collect the fees at delivery of the goods to the recipient. Moreover, this eliminates the hassle for the recipient to be present to receive the goods and pay for the fees.

[0088] In addition, the online postage system **1910** may send the supporting package transaction data obtained from the electronic manifests to the postal authorities **1960** at the USPS, international postal services, foreign postal services, customs agencies, or other suitable entities, whereby the appropriate postal authorities **1970** may identify the specific packages that have pre-paid taxes and duties (e.g., in response to scanning a customs barcode printed on a shipping label affixed to a particular package that is linked to a particular transaction in which the taxes and duties were pre-paid). Accordingly, when the packages that have pre-paid taxes and duties arrive at a postal authority **1970** such as an International Service Center (ISC), the ISC postal authority **1970** may segregate such packages for expedited dispatch.

[0089] Additionally, in one embodiment, in response to collecting the fees for the international shipping label from the shipper, the online postage system **1910** further may send a notification to the recipient of the international package associated with the international shipping label. For example in one embodiment, the shipper may optionally provide an e-mail address or other information that can be used to notify the recipient of the international package in the request provided from the shipper computer **1950** to the online postage system **1910**. Accordingly, the online postage system **1910** may send an e-mail or other suitable notification to the recipient to indicate that the postal authority **1970** has initiated shipment of the international package. For example, in one embodiment, the online postage system **1910** may determine whether an induction scan has occurred for the international package using techniques described in further detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/165,636, which is incorporated by reference above, wherein the notification may be sent to the recipient in response to the induction scan. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the notification sent to the recipient may further indicate that the shipper has pre-paid the taxes and duties for the international package, whereby the package can be delivered even if the recipient is not present to formally receive the package.

[0090] The systems and methods described herein may also provide for the management of USPS and other post service discount programs. Certain international subclasses of mail, such as Global Express Mail, offer discount programs for volume mailers. International mail is the only mail the USPS has freedom to negotiate rates on, as domestic rates are locked by a complete Postal Rate Commission process. Currently, the USPS administers the international discount program in an inefficient and expensive way. The USPS discounts range from 5% to 12%, depending upon annual package volume. The USPS administers this process through a permit-based accounting scheme. In addition to the potential for revenue loss at induction, as described above, the discount program requires additional accounting and management by USPS personnel. Discounts are based on estimated volumes, not

actual volumes, and the discount schedule can therefore be out of sync with the mailer's actual shipment activity.

[0091] The systems and methods described herein provide a mechanism for managing such discount programs on behalf of the USPS. A centralized online postage vendor may collect funds prior to postage consumption by credit card, Automated Clearing House ("ACH") direct debit, or commercial check, whereby mailers can "draw down" on their account balance as postage labels are printed. A discount program administered in this environment may provide advantages including each package bearing full rate postage for the destination country and weight, no revenue loss occurs at induction because the postage is pre-paid and not generated with a permit-based system, discounts can be applied after the fact to reflect the actual activity of the shipper and not estimated volumes, discounts can be inexpensively applied as "electronic credits" to the mailer's existing postage meter account, and USPS auditors and the US Postal Inspection Service have access to detailed package-by-package accounting for all discount program participants.

[0092] Volume mailers often use USPS permit account as a mechanism to pay for international shipments. With such mailers, a permit number and city/state of issue replace the live digital postage indicium. While historically convenient for the mailer, this approach is prone to revenue loss by the USPS. The USPS staff must be careful to make full note of all permit mail inducted. Failure to do so will result in the USPS assuming responsibility for delivering the package without drawing funds from the mailer's permit account. USPS losses due to induction failures of this nature are estimated to be on the order of 1% to 3% of total permit revenue.

[0093] Thus, in one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may provide the mailer with the printing convenience of a permit, while simultaneously assuring the USPS of receiving the associated revenue. By printing live online postage from an active USPS meter account, there may be no need for induction accounting at the Post Office, and therefore no associated revenue loss. Further, the USPS and mailer may save the time and expense of a face-to-face induction process. The completely pre-paid packages can be picked up by a USPS carrier during normal rounds or quickly dropped off at any USPS facility.

[0094] USPS shipping labels differ from other carriers' labels in that they represent negotiable US funds. If a hardware or software error causes this print cycle to fail, the associated dollar amount of the label is potentially lost to the mailer. Unless properly addressed, these losses can drive a shipper away from USPS as a carrier into competing carriers such as FedEx or UPS who have a different billing scheme.

[0095] The systems and methods described herein provide a refund protocol for domestic mail labels that carry delivery confirmation or other tracking barcodes. The patents and patent applications incorporated by reference above describe techniques by which data stored by the centralized postage cluster in conjunction with USPS delivery scan information can be used to determine whether end-user refund requests are reasonable. International shipping labels have been problematic in this regard because only a very limited subset of USPS International mail is tracked—specifically, the relatively expensive Global Express Mail and Global Express Guaranteed services. Not only are these services expensive, they are offered for only a limited number of foreign countries. In fact, the vast majority of mail originating in the US for delivery in foreign countries is not tracked in any way.

12

[0096] Thus, in one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may bond a unique customs form identifier to a postage transaction, which may enable an automatic "round stamp" feature for integrated shipping label and custom forms generated using the mailing software. For example, due to security requirements, all international packages weighing over one pound are required to carry a customs form, and furthermore all customs forms must be scanned and "round-stamped" by USPS personnel at acceptance. In particular, the round stamp indicates to downstream mail processing facilities (i.e., the approximately ten USPS International Service Centers located on US soil that manage all foreign outbound mail) that a local Post Office has accepted the package in either a face-to-face transaction, or via a secure protocol where the mailer is identified as a "known-mailer." Moreover, in addition to the round stamp requirement, all customs forms must further include a certification signature from the mailer to indicate that the declarations in the customs form are correct and that the mail piece does not contain any dangerous, prohibited, or otherwise restricted items. For example, the PS 2976 customs declaration form includes a space for the sender's signature, which certifies that "I, the undersigned, whose name and address are given on the item, certify that the particulars given in this declaration are correct and that this item does not contain any dangerous article or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations."

[0097] To that end, the US Postal Inspection Service has allowed the round stamp and certification signature to be electronically printed on approved integrated shipping label and customs forms if such integrated shipping label and customs forms include an electronic postage indicia. In other words, the round stamp and certification signature can be printed electronically on the approved integrated shipping label and customs forms if the shipping label can be traced back to a particular mailer or individual (e.g., via the electronic postage indicia). Accordingly, in one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may include using the mailing software to automatically generate a round stamp and a certification signature for any appropriate integrated shipping label and customs form bearing electronic postage indicia.

[0098] For example, in one embodiment, the centralized postage-issuing computer system may transmit one or more customs form barcode numbers, which may be generated using the mailing software and scanned upon acceptance at the origin Post Office, via an internal USPS network to a USPS database referred to as "GoldMine," which is currently located in the Eagan, Minnesota Postal Data Center. As such, the centralized postage-issuing computer system may provide the shipping label and customs form information that is generated using the mailing software to the GoldMine database (e.g., on an hourly basis, daily basis, weekly basis, or other intervals), whereby the GoldMine database may store information including the date and time of the induction scan, the origin ZIP code of the Post Office, the package weight (as confirmed by measurement by USPS staff), the destination country, the mail class, the ISC that will handle the package, and the customs form barcode numbers that can be traced back to particular mailers or individuals, among other things.

[0099] Furthermore, in one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may use the USPS GoldMine database and other similar databases to authenticate refund requests on international shipping labels having an integrated customs form and customs form barcode or other unique identifier. While the USPS Goldmine database is on an internal network, all USPS approved online postage vendors also have access to this network. For example, in one embodiment, the refund procedure 2000 may be performed as illustrated in FIG. 15, wherein a mailer (e.g., a user of the mailing software) may request a refund for a given mailing label with an associated customs form barcode or other unique identifier. The request may be received at the centralized postage system on behalf of the USPS in block 2010, wherein block 2020 may include the postage system querying the USPS Goldmine database to determine whether any induction scans have been undertaken for that label within a predetermined expiration time period (e.g., two weeks). If the postage system determines that no induction scan was recorded in the Goldmine database within and/or after the expiration time period in decision block 2030, the postage system may then grant the refund in block 2040. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the postage system may install various auditing controls to track refund trends for a given mailer or other user to detect when systematic abuse of the refund request process has potentially and/or actually occurred.

[0100] Additionally, in one embodiment, the systems and methods described herein may incorporate a tariff or duties payment procedure 2100 as illustrated in FIG. 21, wherein a centralized postage firm, such as USPS, may pay tariffs or duties on behalf of one or more shippers. For example, a shipper may have already collected a tariff from its customer, or simply has agreed to pay the tariffs on the shipment as part of a purchase transaction. The shipper may use the mailing software described herein to compute the required tariffs. The shipper also may request the centralized postage firm to pay the tariff on its behalf. The request may be in the form of an electronic data message sent from the shipper to a central processor, such as online postage system 1910 (shown in FIG. 19) for example. The central processor may receive a request to pay the tariff on the shipper's behalf in block 2102. The central processor may pay the tariffs on the shipper's behalf in block 2104. The central processor may compute the total amount of tariffs paid over a period of time in block 2106. The central processor may periodically charge the shipper for tariff payments made on the shipper's behalf in block 2108. The centralized processor may support a plurality of shippers who in turn are shipping to a plurality of foreign countries. The centralized processor may accumulate the sum total of tariffs due to all countries and use electronic means to transfer the funds to the one or more authorities of participating countries on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis for example. Each funds transfer may be accompanied by a detailed list of unique customs form identification numbers and originating shipper information. If one or more authorities has already received detailed contents data for a particular customs identification number, an authority's processing system could quickly determine which duties have and have not been paid. It is contemplated that a special marking or symbol may be printed on a shipping label to indicate that tariffs have been prepaid.

[0101] As can be appreciated from the above paragraphs, it is further provided a method of determining that duties and taxes on goods in a package have been pre-paid, the package being shipped within an international postal system between an origin country and a destination country. The method includes detecting a postage indicium (e.g., a one dimensional barcode or a 2 dimensional barcode) or mark (e.g.,

picture, a drawing, text, or symbol, or barcode, or any combination of two or more thereof) on a shipping label associated with the package; and determining whether the indicium or mark indicates to an official (e.g., a customs official) of the destination country that taxes and duties for delivering the package containing the goods to the destination country have been pre-paid. In one embodiment, the method further includes receiving the indicium or mark and comparing the indicium or mark with indicia or marks transmitted from the origin country to the destination country. In one embodiment, the method further includes receiving the indicium comprising a scanned one-dimensional barcode and comparing the scanned one-dimensional barcode with one-dimensional barcodes electronically transmitted from a postage service provider (e.g., Endicia) in the origin country to a customs official in the destination country.

[0102] Embodiments of the invention may be made in hardware, firmware, software, or various combinations thereof. The invention may also be implemented as instructions stored on a machine-readable medium, which may be read and executed using one or more processing devices. In one embodiment, the machine-readable medium may include various mechanisms for storing and/or transmitting information in a form that can be read by a machine (e.g., a computing device). For example, a machine-readable storage medium may include read only memory, random access memory, magnetic disk storage media, optical storage media, flash memory devices, and other media for storing information, and a machine-readable transmission media may include forms of propagated signals, including carrier waves, infrared signals, digital signals, and other media for transmitting information. While firmware, software, routines, or instructions may be described in the above disclosure in terms of specific exemplary aspects and embodiments performing certain actions, it will be apparent that such descriptions are merely for the sake of convenience and that such actions in fact result from computing devices, processing devices, processors, controllers, or other devices or machines executing the firmware, software, routines, or instructions.

[0103] Furthermore, aspects and embodiments may be described in the above disclosure as including particular features, structures, or characteristics, but it will be apparent that every aspect or embodiment may or may not necessarily include the particular features, structures, or characteristics. Further, where particular features, structures, or characteristics have been described in connection with a specific aspect or embodiment, it will be understood that such features, structures, or characteristics may be included with other aspects or embodiments, whether or not explicitly described. Thus, various changes and modifications may be made to the preceding disclosure without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention, and the specification and drawings should therefore be regarded as exemplary only, with the scope of the invention determined solely by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-usable medium communicatively coupled to an online postage system configured to manage landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system, the computer-usable medium having a sequence of instructions which, when executed on a processor, cause the processor to:

receive a request for an international shipping label, wherein the request includes at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered;

generate a unique self-validating postage indicium or mark in response to the request, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium or mark indicates that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid; and

enable printing of the international shipping label having the unique self-validating postage indicium printed thereon, wherein the international shipping label further has a customs declaration form that includes the description of the contents of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

2. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the international shipping label further has a unique customs form number printed thereon, wherein the customs form number is linked to the unique self-validating postage indicium.

3. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium includes a two-dimensional barcode.

4. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to:

query a database containing a harmonization table that provides an international classification system, wherein the database is queried to obtain one or more harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents; and

calculate estimated taxes and duties required to deliver the package containing the contents corresponding to the harmonization codes to the destination country, wherein the pre-paid landed costs include at least the estimated taxes and duties.

5. The computer-usable medium of claim 4, wherein the request further includes a valuation of the contents for the package and an origin country from which the package is to be shipped.

6. The computer-usable medium of claim 5, wherein the estimated taxes and duties are calculated as a function of the destination country, the harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents, the valuation of the contents, and the origin country.

7. The computer-usable medium of claim 5, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to track the description of the contents and the valuation of the contents provided in the request to detect potential or actual occurrences of fraud or abuse.

8. The computer-usable medium of claim 4, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to query the database containing a tariff schedule for the destination country, wherein the database is queried to map the one or more harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

9. The computer-usable medium of claim 8, wherein the estimated taxes and duties are calculated based on the mapping of the harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

10. The computer-usable medium of claim 4, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to transmit harmonization codes, descriptions of contents, and/or tracking numbers of particular packages to one or more authorities within the international postal system prior to the arrival of the particular packages at the one or more authorities.

11. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to collect fees for the international shipping label, wherein the collected fees include at least the pre-paid landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country.

12. The computer-usable medium of claim 11, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to:

send the fees collected for the pre-paid landed costs to one or more authorities within the international postal system; and

send a transaction record associated with the package to the one or more authorities within the international postal system, wherein the transaction record links the unique self-validating postage indicium to the international shipping label to be placed on the package.

13. The computer-usable medium of claim 11, wherein the collected fees further include one or more of a surcharge or service fee for the online postage system.

14. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to require that the request includes an acknowledgement to pay additional funds to the online postage system if actual costs for delivering the package to the destination country exceed the pre-paid landed costs.

15. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to send a notification to a recipient of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

16. The computer-usable medium of claim 15, wherein the notification indicates that the package has been accepted for shipment within the international postal system or that the landed costs for delivering the package have been pre-paid.

17. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the international shipping label further has a round stamp and a certification signature printed thereon.

18. The computer-usable medium of claim 1, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to:

receive a request to pay one or more tariffs on behalf of one or more shippers;

pay one or more tariffs on behalf of the one or more shippers;

compute a total amount of tariffs paid on behalf of the one or more shipper; and

charge the one or more shippers for tariff payments made on behalf of the one or more shippers.

19. An online postage system configured to manage landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system, comprising:

a postage-issuing computer system configured to communicate with a user computer, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to:

receive a request for an international shipping label from the user computer, wherein the request includes at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered;

generate a unique self-validating postage indicium in response to the request, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium indicates that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid; and

enable printing of the international shipping label having the unique self-validating postage indicium printed thereon, wherein the international shipping label further has a customs declaration form that includes the description of the contents of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the international shipping label further has a unique customs form number printed thereon, wherein the customs form number is linked to the unique self-validating postage indicium.

21. The system of claim 19, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium includes a two-dimensional barcode.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to:

query a database containing a harmonization table that provides an international classification system, wherein the database is queried to obtain one or more harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents; and

calculate estimated taxes and duties required to deliver the package containing the contents corresponding to the harmonization codes to the destination country, wherein the pre-paid landed costs include at least the estimated taxes and duties.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the request further includes a valuation of the contents for the package and an origin country from which the package is to be shipped.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein the estimated taxes and duties are calculated as a function of the destination country, the harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents, the valuation of the contents, and the origin country.

25. The system of claim 23, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to track the description of the contents and the valuation of the contents provided in the request to detect potential or actual occurrences of fraud or abuse.

26. The system of claim 22, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to query the database containing a tariff schedule for the destination country, wherein the database is queried to map the one or more harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

27. The system of claim 26, wherein the estimated taxes and duties are calculated based on the mapping of the harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

28. The computer-usable medium of claim 22, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to transmit harmonization codes, descriptions of contents, and/or tracking numbers of particular packages to one or more authorities within the international postal system prior to the arrival of the particular packages at the one or more authorities.

29. The system of claim 19, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to collect fees for the international shipping label, wherein the collected fees include at least the pre-paid landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to:

send the fees collected for the pre-paid landed costs to one or more authorities within the international postal system; and

send a transaction record associated with the package to the one or more authorities within the international postal system, wherein the transaction record links the unique self-validating postage indicium to the international shipping label to be placed on the package.

31. The system of claim 29, wherein the collected fees further include one or more of a surcharge or service fee for the online postage system.

32. The system of claim 19, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to require that the request includes an acknowledgement to pay additional funds to the online postage system if actual costs for delivering the package to the destination country exceed the pre-paid landed costs.

33. The system of claim 19, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to send a notification to a recipient of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the notification indicates that the package has been accepted for shipment within the international postal system or that the landed costs for delivering the package have been pre-paid.

35. The system of claim 19, wherein the international shipping label further has a round stamp and a certification signature printed thereon.

36. The system of claim 19, wherein the postage-issuing computer system is further configured to:

receive a request to pay one or more tariffs on behalf of one or more shippers;

pay one or more tariffs on behalf of the one or more shippers;

compute a total amount of tariffs paid on behalf of the one or more shippers; and

charge the one or more shippers for tariff payments made on behalf of the one or more shippers.

37. A method for managing landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system, comprising:

receiving a request for an international shipping label, wherein the request is received at an online postage system, and wherein the request includes at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered;

generating a unique self-validating postage indicium at the online postage system in response to the request, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium indicates that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid; and

enabling printing of the international shipping label having the unique self-validating postage indicium printed thereon, wherein the international shipping label further has a customs declaration form that includes the description of the contents of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein the international shipping label further has a unique customs form number printed thereon, wherein the customs form number is linked to the unique self-validating postage indicium.

39. The method of claim 37, wherein the unique self-validating postage indicium includes a two-dimensional barcode.

40. The method of claim 37, further comprising:

querying a database coupled to the online postage system containing a harmonization table that provides an international classification system, wherein the online postage system queries the database to obtain one or more harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents; and

calculating estimated taxes and duties required to deliver the package containing the contents corresponding to the harmonization codes to the destination country, wherein the pre-paid landed costs include at least the estimated taxes and duties.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein the request further includes a valuation of the contents for the package and an origin country from which the package is to be shipped.

42. The method of claim 41, wherein the online postage system calculates the estimated taxes and duties as a function of the destination country, the harmonization codes corresponding to the description of the contents, the valuation of the contents, and the origin country.

43. The method of claim 41, further comprising tracking the description of the contents and the valuation of the contents provided in the request at the online postage system to detect potential or actual occurrences of fraud or abuse.

44. The method of claim 40, further comprising querying the database containing a tariff schedule for the destination country, wherein the online postage system queries the database to map the one or more harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

45. The method of claim 44, wherein the estimated taxes and duties are calculated based on the mapping of the harmonization codes to the tariff schedule for the destination country.

46. The computer-usable medium of claim 40, wherein the sequence of instructions further cause the processor to transmit harmonization codes, descriptions of contents, and/or tracking numbers of particular packages to one or more authorities within the international postal system prior to the arrival of the particular packages at the one or more authorities.

47. The method of claim 37, further comprising collecting fees at the online postage system for the international shipping label, wherein the collected fees include at least the pre-paid landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country.

48. The method of claim 47, further comprising:

sending the fees collected for the pre-paid landed costs from the online postage system to one or more authorities within the international postal system; and

sending a transaction record associated with the package from the online postage system to the one or more authorities within the international postal system, wherein the transaction record links the unique self-validating postage indicium to the international shipping label to be placed on the package.

49. The method of claim 47, wherein the collected fees further include one or more of a surcharge or service fee for the online postage system.

50. The method of claim 37, further comprising requiring that the request includes an acknowledgement to pay additional funds to the online postage system if actual costs for delivering the package to the destination country exceed the pre-paid landed costs.

51. The method of claim 37, further comprising sending a notification from the online postage system to a recipient of the package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed.

52. The method of claim 51, wherein the notification indicates that the package has been accepted for shipment within the international postal system or that the landed costs for delivering the package have been pre-paid.

53. The method of claim 37, wherein the international shipping label further has a round stamp and a certification signature printed thereon.

54. The method of claim 37, further comprising:

receiving a request to pay one or more tariffs on behalf of one or more shippers;

paying one or more tariffs on behalf of the one or more shippers;

computing a total amount tariffs paid on behalf of the one or more shippers; and

charging the one or more shippers for tariff payments on behalf of the one or more shippers.

55. A computer-usable medium communicatively coupled to an online postage system configured to manage landed cost and harmonization for international packages shipped within an international postal system, the computer-usable medium having a sequence of instructions which, when executed on a processor, cause the processor to:

receive a request for an international shipping label, wherein the request includes at least a description of contents for a package onto which the international shipping label is to be placed and a destination country where the package is to be delivered;

generate a postage indicium, mark or symbol in response to the request, wherein the postage indicium, mark or symbol indicates to a customs official of destination country

that landed costs for delivering the package containing the contents to the destination country have been pre-paid.

56. The computer-usable medium of claim 55, wherein the indicium is a barcode tracking indicium for tracking the package.

57. The computer-usable medium of claim 55, wherein the indicium is a two-dimensional barcode indicium containing information about the package including origin ZIP code, postage amount, or any combination of two or more thereof.

58. The computer-usable medium of claim 55, wherein the mark is a drawing, a picture, or a barcode, or any combination of two or more thereof.

59. The computer-usable medium of claim 55, wherein the landed costs comprise taxes and duties.

60. A method of determining that duties and taxes on goods in a package have been pre-paid, the package being shipped within an international postal system between an origin country and a destination country, the method comprising:

detecting a postage indicium or mark on a shipping label associated with the package; and

determining whether the indicium or mark indicates to a customs official of the destination country that taxes and duties for delivering the package containing the goods to the destination country have been pre-paid.

61. The method of claim 60, further comprising receiving the indicium or mark and comparing the indicium or mark with indicia or marks transmitted from the origin country to the destination country.

62. The method of claim 60, further comprising receiving the indicium comprising a scanned one-dimensional barcode and comparing the scanned one-dimensional barcode with one-dimensional barcodes electronically transmitted from a postage service provider in the origin country to an official in the destination country.

* * * * *