

**Generic Information Collection Request:  
Early stage scoping interviews for the Commodity Flow Survey**

**Request:** The Census Bureau plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725 for the Commodity Flow Survey (CFS)). These activities will include early stage scoping interviews with respondents to the 2017 CFS to learn what they would look for in an alternative reporting option, i.e., a portal.

The CFS is administered every 5 years through a partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). It provides data on the movement of goods in the United States including commodities shipped, their value, weight, and mode of transportation, as well as the origin and destination of shipments of commodities from manufacturing, mining, wholesale, and selected retail and services establishments. These data are used by policy makers and transportation planners to evaluate the demand for transportation facilities and services, energy use, and safety risk and environmental concerns. Additionally, the data collected from CFS are also used to analyze trends in the movement of goods, mapping spatial patterns of commodity and vehicle flows, forecasting demands for the movement of goods, and determining needs for associated infrastructure and equipment.

Respondents to the CFS have traditionally been asked to provide a sample of their shipments four separate times during the reporting year, which occurred every 5 years. Some respondents to the CFS reported this process of creating a sample to be burdensome, and expressed interest in altering this method of data collection. Census Bureau staff created a secure depository (i.e., portal) for respondents to upload large amounts of shipment data from their records on a semi-continuous/automatic basis, thus eliminating the need for respondents to create a quarterly sample. Small scale participation in a trial of this new method of ‘passive data collection’ was found to be successful for some companies, and had promising implications for companies of similar attributes (i.e., size, employee count, resources) who could potentially participant as well.

Researchers will conduct early stage scoping interviews to assess the feasibility of wide scale implementation of this data collection change, and its potential effects on respondent burden. Another goal is to determine whether the CFS can successfully move to an annual collection, as opposed to one that occurs every 5 years.

Further information regarding the Commodity Flow Survey can be found at this website:  
<https://www.census.gov/econ/cfs/> .

The Commodity Flow Survey collects data pertaining to hazardous materials (HAZMAT). The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has an interest in collecting more detailed data that specifically pertains to HAZMAT packaging.

PHMSA is the primary regulator of packaging for hazardous materials. The objective of PHMSA is to help ensure the safe transportation of HAZMAT, and to document its movement across the country. By collecting more specific information about HAZMAT via the CFS, it may assist analysts in tracking trends and determining HAZMAT exposure and risk profile. PHMSA having access to more information about the flow of HAZMAT may also help ensure updated safety

standards are being met. For example, there is a list of requirements for shipping HAZMAT by mode of transportation ([49 CFR 172.101](#)). Currently, when PHMSA standards are updated and changes are made to this list, without anecdotal evidence, there is no way to measure whether those changes have been implemented. In these instances, safety can be improved by having access to a more consistent flow of data, as well as more detailed information about the transportation of HAZMAT.

Researchers will assess whether respondents are able to provide more detailed data related to HAZMAT without a substantial/significant increase in burden. If this information can be collected, it may further assist PHMSA in improving the safety of HAZMAT transportation.

Further information regarding the PHMSA can be found at this website:  
<https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/>

**Purpose:** The purpose of this evaluation is to understand the ability and willingness of companies to provide data to the Commodity Flow Survey via this new data transfer process. Researchers would like to learn more about how this process is working for companies already participating, and how the process can be implemented for interested parties.

Researchers have an additional interest in assessing the capability of respondents to answer more detailed questions pertaining to HAZMAT transportation and packaging.

The results from these early stage scoping interviews will be recorded and a report produced that outlines the findings and recommendations for improvement.

**Population of Interest:** U.S. companies that ship goods, across a variety of sizes, industries, and locations.

**Timeline:** The first round of testing will be conducted in August/September 2019. A second round of testing will take place in October/November 2019.

**Language:** Testing will be conducted in English only.

**Method:** We plan to conduct in-person early stage interviews with approximately 40 respondents. Travel is required for the interviews (one-two trips per round of testing)<sup>1</sup>. The interviews may be recorded (with consent), to facilitate summarization.

**Sample:** We plan to conduct a total of 40 interviews across both rounds of testing. The sample size necessary for this test was determined by qualitative research experience. We plan to conduct interviews with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of business establishments. The sampling frame for these interviews comes from a list of companies that were sampled to participate in the 2017 CFS. Participating companies will most likely have submitted responses to the CFS survey, but not necessarily. We will focus on the small number of companies that used spreadsheet reporting in 2017, but will also meet with other companies to get their input as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Testing locations to be determined.

**Recruitment:** Respondents will be recruited via email and phone. Respondents will be informed that their participation is voluntary.

**Protocol:** The protocol for the study is enclosed (see Attachment A). We anticipate that each interview will take 60 minutes to complete.

**Use of Incentive:** Monetary incentives for participation will not be offered.

Below is a list of materials to be used in the current study:

1. **Attachment A:** Protocol used to outline how the research study will be conducted
2. **Attachment B:** Consent form to obtain participant consent for participation and recording of the session
3. **Attachment C:** 2017 CFS survey to illustrate the survey being evaluated

**Length of interview:** For the debriefing interviews, we expect that each interview will last no more than 60 minutes (40 cases x 60 minutes per case = 40 hours). Additionally, to recruit respondents we expect to make up to 5 phone contacts per completed case. The recruiting calls are expected to last on average 3 minutes per call (5 attempted phone calls per completed case x 40 cases x 3 minute per case = 10 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for this project is 50 hours (40 hours for interviews + 10 hours for recruiting).

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

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