Trade Statistics Coding Systems

General Information

- Number of Digits

Trade statistics are organized using various numerical coding systems. The longer the string of digits, the greater the degree of specificity of the commodity. One or two-digit numbers represent greatly aggregated data for broad categories of commodities. Seven or ten-digit numbers represent fairly specific commodities.

- Systems in Use

Today, the two main systems for international trade statistics are the Harmonised System (HS) and the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC).

- Revisions

These codes schemes are occasionally revised. You should be aware of the revision being used for the data that you're studying and use the appropriate revision of the code book.

- Indexes and Keyword Searching

Although you can get a code number quickly from the alphabetic index in the printed code books, the definitions in the actual body of the text will give you a better idea about how that commodity is being defined and show its context to other commodities.

In electronic sources, you can generally search for matching text to find commodities, without necessarily using the guides to the coding scheme. However, knowing the numbers ahead of time and understanding how a term is used will make your search more precise and fast.

By enter keywords or HS code, you can search a list of products and commodities with their 6 digit, 4 digit, or 2 digit - HS codes at the online database below:
http://www.foreign-trade.com/reference/hscode.htm

Harmonized (Harmonised) System

The latest version of the Harmonized System (HS) adopted by the United States is published by the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) as the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States. You can use this guide to determine the numerical code assigned to a particular commodity; the descriptive passages can be helpful to determine the context of a particular commodity within the classification. Use the alphabetical index at the end to get an idea of the code, then check that number in the main body of the text to verify its definition and understand how it's being used. This goes to the 10-digit level of detail.

You can also simply do a text search in the electronic databases, but you don't always fully understand the relationships between various commodities.

SITC (Standard International Trade Classification)

Published by the United Nations as the Commodity Indexes for the Standard International Trade Classification. It tends to be not quite as detailed as the Harmonized System. As with the Harmonized Schedules, use the alphabetical index at the back of the second volume to get an idea of the code, then check that number in the main body of the text to verify its definition and understand how it's being used. Use the Revision appropriate to the particular series. The books go to the 5-digit level and can help determine a broad category of commodity. Some of the data sources are more detailed.

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