Why might I need to think about export controls for my international travel?

Although export control considerations most commonly arise in the research context, other activities by USC personnel, including international travel on university-related business by any USC employee in connection with their job responsibilities, can raise export control issues. In addition, international travel can raise data security and safety issues depending on who is traveling, where you are going, what you are taking with you, and who you will be working with.

What items or information are OK to take with me on my international trip? Can I bring my laptop?

Taking a data storage device (e.g., a laptop, tablet, smartphone, USB flash drive, or smartwatch) outside of the United States typically does not require an export license, as long as the device does not also contain “special purpose” encryption software or other software or data that is “controlled” under U.S. laws and regulations. “Special purpose” encryption refers to software other than standard commercial encryption software and does not include so-called “mass market” encryption software that comes with the device (e.g., encryption that is built into Microsoft Windows operating systems or VPN applications).

Traveling abroad with research-related information (e.g., publications, presentations, underlying research results) would typically not require an export license, as long as the research is available in the public domain or could be considered “fundamental research” (e.g., research that is ordinarily published and shared broadly within the scientific community). However, certain destinations such as Iran are subject to stricter export control restrictions and a license may be required.

What items or information might require an export license before taking them overseas?

Taking the following items abroad in connection with international travel may require governmental authorization in the form of a license:

- Devices with non-commercial, “special purpose” encryption software
- Devices that contain proprietary or export-controlled data
- Sophisticated research equipment or tools (e.g., Inertial Measurement Units, infrared cameras, night vision equipment)
- Defense articles controlled under the ITAR that could be used to conduct research (e.g., certain kinds of thermal imaging cameras, night vision devices, toxicological agents, or spacecraft systems and associated equipment)
- Pathogens and/or toxins, or genetic materials/GMOs that contain or code for them that could be used to conduct research

I will be giving a talk at a conference in another country. Are there export considerations?

Possibly. When traveling to give a talk at a foreign conference, consider the following:

- Where are you going? If you intend to travel to a comprehensively sanctioned country/region (e.g., Iran, Cuba, Syria, North Korea, or the Crimea region and Sevastopol, the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic,”), or a country with increased export restrictions (e.g., Belarus, Russia, China) contact OCEC for assistance prior to travel.
- What are you taking with you? Be aware that any information and data on electronic devices can be accessed and copied without your knowledge in almost any country.
- Is all the information published/in the public domain? Public domain information is not restricted.
- Is any information you will take with you “controlled” under U.S. export control regulations? Always contact OCEC for guidance in these situations.

I’d like to learn more about international travel and export controls. Where can I find additional information?

The Office of Culture, Ethics and Compliance (OCEC) provides International Travel guidance that applies regardless of destination. You can also view USC's International Collaborations and Export Controls policy. For questions, please contact Emily Pender, Manager of Export Controls, at epender@usc.edu.