



What Every Importer Should Know about Overweight Containers

Weight loss is a huge business. In 2014 global sales numbers weighed in at more than [\\$148.1 billion](#). However, there is an entirely different weight issue that importers should think about because this one could cost you in big ways. Overweight shipping containers may not be at the top of your list of potential shipping expense but there are good reasons to pay attention.

Insurers estimate that [20 percent](#) of all shipping containers are overweight. It's true that not every overweight container is a hazard but the potential for accident is increased when containers are dangerously overloaded then improperly stacked on the vessel. Overweight container stacks can collapse during rough seas, resulting in injury to personnel and lost or damaged cargo. If cargo shifts during transit and requires re-stowage the result is a costly delay and additional expense for the importer. These hazards prompted the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to approve amendments to the International Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) rules which call for all containers to be weight certified before loading on board a vessel.



Overweight shipping containers become a different problem when they are transferred to a truck chassis for highway transport. Overweight trucks take a toll on US highways costing millions of dollars in taxpayer funds to repair. As a result, various federal, state and local regulations are in place to discourage the transport of [overweight cargo on the highway](#).

So what can you the shipper do to avoid problems with overweight containers? You can start by verifying the container weight. This might seem like the most obvious thing to do, but it can be a challenge for importers or consignees in receipt of cargo that has been packed at origin. In general, the shipper tells the carrier or shipping line the container weight at the time of booking and most shipping lines will allow a 1-2 ton variance in weight without imposing a penalty. Clear communication with the shipper at origin and complete shipping documentation is a good place to begin.

If you are the importer or consignee it is important to talk to your logistics professional. When a trucker quotes a price to receive your goods at the port and then transport them to your facility, they must rely on the information provided on the bill of lading. Communicate with the vendor to determine whether or not they verify this information at the scale. If the weight is accurately recorded on your documentation the drayage company knows exactly what they are dealing with. Remember, if the paperwork accompanying your container isn't correct you won't know it unless the trucker verifies that information on a scale.



There are a number of potential overweight scenarios that can result in unexpected costs or delivery delay:

- Additional charges from the drayage company for hauling containers found to be simply outside weight allowance.
- A container could be so overweight it may require costly redistribution or trans-load which can delay an otherwise standard delivery. This is rare as limits across the board tend to prevent this type of overage from shipping. However it is possible when combining multiple suppliers into one container as the total weight is more fluid.
- Remember that gross container weight isn't the only factor. Local regulations may also limit the legal weight allowed per axle. It is possible for a container to be within the gross legal weight limit but overweight on an axle resulting in tri-axle or other special equipment charges.
- A container requiring special equipment can also hinder receiving plans as special equipment may not be available for drop/pull deliveries required by some receiving warehouses. This can lead to unexpected costs or rescheduling if a receiving warehouse is not equipped for both live unload and drop/pull deliveries.

When it comes to avoiding the pitfalls of an overweight shipment, remember that knowing your state and local regulations is important. Attention to detail can prevent costly delay so pay attention to the paperwork; including the bill of lading, scale tickets, etc. and keep in mind that [your freight forwarder is a good resource](#) if you are not certain which local, regional or national regulations you must follow.

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