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Verified Gross Mass

A Commitment to Safety

What is Verified Gross Mass?

Effective from 1st July 2016, with the SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) amendment covering container weighing regulations, a packed container will no longer be allowed to be loaded on board vessels unless its Verified Gross Mass (VGM) has been provided by the shipper to the ocean carriers and/or port terminal representatives prior to the load list cut-off date.

The new regulation was adopted by the IMO (International Maritime Organization) to increase maritime safety and reduce the dangers to cargo, containers, and all those involved in container transport throughout the supply chain.

The Verified Gross Mass (VGM) is the weight of the cargo including dunnage and bracing plus the tare weight of the container carrying this cargo. SOLAS requires the shipper to provide VGM in a “shipping document,” either as part of the shipping instruction or in a separate communication, before vessel loading.

The shipper is obliged to verify the gross mass of the containers carrying their cargo by either of two permissible weighing methods before these containers can be loaded on a vessel.

Method 1	Requires weighing the container after it has been packed.
Method 2	<p>Requires weighing all the cargo and contents of the container and adding those weights to the container's tare weight as indicated on the door end of the container.</p> <p>Method 2 will not be practical for shippers of bulk commodities like scrap, grain, etc., and it will be up to local authorities to grant permission to use this method.</p>

If the VGM information is not shared in time by the shipper, then the containers will not be loaded on board the vessel – with no exception.

Impact on the shipper

With the new regulation, the shipper will be the responsible party for providing the verified gross mass of every container to the ocean carrier and the terminal representative before vessel loading. But who is the shipper in the context of this new regulation? The shipper is the legal entity;

Named on the ocean bill of lading or sea way bill or equivalent multimodal transport document as shipper.

With whom (or in whose name or on whose behalf) a contract of carriage has been concluded with a shipping company.

Thus, irrespective if delegated to a 3rd party or similar, the shipper will always be the responsible party for providing VGM information so they should be aware of the impact of this new procedure;

Shipper will need to provide VGM information of their containers on shipping instructions no matter whether they send this documentation manually or via EDI.

Shipper will need to plan for VGM in the shipment cycle.

They need to establish a process between supply chain members (forwarders, truckers, terminals and shipping line) integrating weighing service.

Shippers need to calculate the potential cost impact for arranging this service as they are legally responsible to obtain and provide VGM.

They need to be aware of possible local legislation regarding government imposed penalties/fines.

If a shipper does not comply and provide the VGM information in time the carrier and the terminal representative will not load the containers on the vessel.

Our aim is to ensure an easy submission of VGM for our customers and easy information exchange with terminals.

Shippers will need to share VGM information of their containers on shipping instructions, no matter whether they send this document manually, or electronically.

Impact on the vendor (terminal operators)

The IMO regulation is clear that no container shall be loaded on a vessel unless a VGM is provided- with no exceptions. It is, therefore, the terminal operator's obligation that a VGM exists before including containers in the final stowage plan. Carriers will ensure that the final load list only includes containers with a VGM.

Local and national legislation will dictate the consequences of loading a container without a VGM, and terminal operators naturally need to be aware of this.

Terminal operators will be receiving the VGM information either from the shipper or from the ocean carrier, and will need to have EDI or other processes in place to receive and process this information. If the VGM is obtained by weighing at the terminal operator's premises, the terminal operator needs a process to send this VGM information back to the carrier.

In rare cases, terminals may weigh a packed container for which a VGM has already been communicated.

Where different, the VGM arrived at by the terminal will be used.

Other vendors that are not part of the SOLAS Amendment - providing services such as barge, rail, depot, trucking, etc. at origin – may be included in the delivery of information relevant for the SOLAS Amendment where this is practical.