

SHIPPING DOCUMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Shipping documents are forms that accompany a shipment listing the date shipped, the customer, the method of shipment, the quantities and specifications of goods shipped. This section covers documents that are commonly used in shipping industry but specific requirements vary by destination and product. It is divided into various subsections:

COMMON EXPORT DOCUMENTS

Commercial Invoice

A commercial invoice is a bill for the goods from the seller to the buyer. These invoices are often used by governments to determine the true value of goods when assessing customs duties.

Governments that use the commercial invoice to control imports will often specify its form, content, number of copies, language to be used and other characteristics.

Export Packing List

Considerably more detailed and informative than a standard domestic packing list, an export packing list, seller, buyer, shipper, invoice number, date of shipment, mode of transport, carrier, and itemizes quantity, description, the type of package, such as a box, crate, drum, or carton, the quantity of packages, total net and gross weight (in kilograms), package marks, and dimensions, if appropriate. Both commercial stationers and freight forwarders carry packing list forms. A packing list may serve as conforming document. It is not a substitute for a commercial invoice.

Pro Forma Invoice

A pro forma invoice is an invoice prepared by the exporter before shipping the goods, informing the buyer of the goods to be sent, their value, and other key specifications. It also can be used as an offering of sale or price quotation.

TRANSPORTATION DOCUMENTS

Airway Bill

An air waybill (AWB) is a document that accompanies goods shipped by an international air courier to provide detailed information about the shipment and allow it to be tracked. Air freight shipments require airway bills. Airway bills are shipper-specific (i.e., USPS, Fed-Ex, UPS, DHL, etc.).

Bill of Lading

A bill of lading is a contract between the owner of the goods and the carrier (as with domestic shipments). For vessels, there are two types: a straight bill of lading, which is non-negotiable, and a negotiable or shipper's order bill of lading. The latter can be bought, sold, or traded while the goods are in transit. The customer usually needs an original as proof of ownership to take possession of the goods.

EXPORT COMPLIANCE DOCUMENTS

Export Licenses

An export license is a government document that authorizes the export of specific goods in specific quantities to a particular destination. This document may be required for most or all exports to some countries or for other countries only under special circumstances..

Certificate of origin

- Generic Certificate of Origin

The Certificate of Origin (CO) is required by some countries for all or only certain products. In many cases, a statement of origin printed on company letterhead will suffice. The exporter should verify whether a CO is required with the buyer and/or an experienced shipper/freight forwarder or the Trade Information Center.

Note: Some countries (i.e., numerous Middle Eastern countries) require that certificate of origin be notarized, certified by local chamber of commerce and legalized by the commercial section of the consulate of the destination country.

For textile products, an importing country may require a certificate of origin issued by the manufacturer. The number of required copies and language may vary from country to country.

- Certificate of Origin for claiming benefits under Free Trade Agreements.

Special certificates may be required for countries with which the United States has free trade agreements (FTAs). Some certificate of origin including those required by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the FTAs with Israel and Jordan, are prepared by the exporter. Others including those required by the FTAs with Australia; the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) countries; Chile; and Morocco; are the importer's responsibility).

OTHER CERTIFICATES FOR SHIPMENTS OF SPECIFIC GOODS.

Certificate of Analysis

A certificate of analysis can be required for seeds, grain, health foods, dietary supplements, fruits and vegetables, and pharmaceutical products.

Dangerous Goods Certificate

Exports submitted for handling by air carriers and air freight forwarders classified as dangerous goods need to be accompanied by the Shipper's Declaration for Dangerous Goods required by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The exporter is responsible for accuracy of the form and ensuring that requirements related to packaging, marking, and other required information by IATA have been met.

For shipment of dangerous goods it is critical to identify goods by proper name, comply with packaging and labeling requirements, which vary depending upon the type of product shipper and the country shipped to. For ocean exports, hazardous material regulations are contained in the International Maritime Dangerous Goods regulations.

Fumigation Certificate

The Fumigation Certificate provides evidence of the fumigation of exported goods (especially agricultural products, used clothing, etc.). This form assists in the quarantine clearance of any goods of plant or animal origin. The seller is typically required to fumigate the commodity at his or her expense a maximum of 15 days prior to loading.

Health Certificate

For shipment of live animals and animal products (processed foodstuffs, poultry, meat, fish, seafood, dairy products, and eggs and egg products). Note: some countries require that health certificates be notarized or certified by a chamber and legalized by a consulate.

Pre-Shipment Inspections

The governments of a number of countries have contracted with international inspection companies to verify the quantity, quality, and price of shipments imported into their countries. The purpose of such inspections is to ensure that the price charged by the exporter reflects the true value of the goods, to prevent substandard goods from entering the country, and to deflect attempts to avoid payment of customs duties. Requirements for pre-shipment inspection are normally spelled out in letter-of-credit or other documentary requirements.

Insurance Certificate

Insurance certificates are used to assure the consignee that insurance will cover the loss of or damage to the cargo during transit. These can be obtained from your freight forwarder or publishing house. Note: an airway bill can serve as an insurance certificate for a shipment by air. Some countries may require certification or notification.

Phytosanitary Certificate

All shipments of fresh fruits and vegetables, seeds, nuts, flour, rice, grains, lumber, plants, and plant materials require a federal phytosanitary certificate. The certificate must verify that the product is free from specified epidemics and/or agricultural diseases.

Weight Certificate

A certificate of weight is a document issued by customs, certifying gross weight of the exported goods.

OTHER RELATED DOCUMENTS

Dock Receipt and Warehouse Receipt

A dock receipt and warehouse receipt are used to transfer accountability when the export item is moved by the domestic carrier to the port of embarkation and left with the ship line for export.

Import License

Import licenses are the responsibility of the importer and vary depending upon destination and product. However, including a copy of an import license with the rest of your documentation may in some cases help avoid problems with customs in the destination country.

Shipper's Letter of Instruction

The shipper's letter of instruction is issued by the exporter to the forwarding agent and includes shipping instructions for air or ocean shipment.

Letter of credit

A letter of credit, also known as a documentary credit or banker's commercial credit, or letter of undertaking, is a payment mechanism used in international trade to provide an economic guarantee from a creditworthy bank to an exporter of goods.

Self declaration form (SDF)

A document submitted to customs authorities by exporters verifying that shipping bills are accurate and complete. An exporter confirms on form **SDF** that the amount paid by the buyer is the same as the full **export** value stated on the shipping bill. Also called statutory declaration form.