

The Solas container weight verification requirement:

As a member of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and signatory of the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (Solas) the Republic of South Africa is obliged to introduce protocols which the organisation has ratified.

A proposed amendment to Solas Chapter VI and the relevant IMO guidelines relating to the mandatory verification of the gross weight of containers prior to loading on vessels was adopted at the 94th session of the Maritime Safety Committee in November 2014.

The amendment will come into force on the 1st of July 2016 and will require that carriers receive the verified gross weight of export containers prior to loading. There are some exceptions, for example containers carried under roll-on roll-off conditions. However, the regulation will apply to the great majority of export containers.

The obligation to provide the verified gross weight of the container to the carrier prior to loading rests with the shipper and must be transmitted to the carrier prior to delivery to the container terminal or loading berth.

The IMO Guidelines are clear that the shipper named on the ocean carrier bill of lading is the party responsible for providing the container's verified gross mass. Thus, the "master" forwarder named on the ocean carrier's bill of lading is responsible for the accurate cargo weight verification of all the cargo from all the co-loading forwarders using the

container, and may not simply pass on cargo weights that may have been declared by those other forwarders.

The lack of a signed shipper weight verification can be remedied by weighing the packed container at the port. If the marine terminal does not have equipment to weigh the container and provide a verified weight, alternative means must be found to obtain a verified container weight; otherwise, the packed container may not be loaded on to the ship.

When a marine terminal receives a packed export container that does not have a signed shipper weight verification, there will need to be processes in place at the terminal for obtaining the weight of such containers and using such weights in the vessel stow plan. Terminals and carriers will need to agree on how these situations will be handled.

The regulation provides for two basic methods of arriving at a verified weight:

Method 1:

By weighing the packed container using calibrated and certified equipment.

Method 2:

By weighing all packages and cargo items, including the weight of pallets, dunnage and other securing material to be packed in the container and adding the tare mass of the container to the sum of the individual weights.

The regulation further requires that the process of verification must be approved by a “competent authority” in the State where packing was completed.

It is important to note that, for the shipper’s weight verification to be compliant with the Solas requirement it must be “signed”, meaning a specific person representing the shipper is named and identified as having verified the accuracy of the weight calculation on behalf of the shipper.

The shipping document shall be signed by a person duly authorized by the shipper and submitted to the master or his representative and to the terminal representative sufficiently in advance so as to be used in the preparation of the ship stowage plan. This document can be part of the shipping instructions to the shipping company or a separate communication. The document should clearly highlight that the gross mass provided is the “verified gross mass”.

Irrespective of its form, the document declaring the verified gross mass of the packed container should be signed by a person duly authorized by the shipper. The signature may be an electronic signature or may be replaced by the name in capitals of the person authorized to sign it.

If the shipping document, with regard to a packed container, does not provide the verified gross mass and the master or his representative and the terminal representative have not obtained the verified gross mass of the packed container, it shall not be loaded on to the ship.”