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Best Practice for the Packing & Unpacking of Ocean Containers **(Cargo Transport Units – CTUs)**

While it may appear that an international transaction is solely between a seller (shipper) and a buyer (importer), there are many intermediaries who play unique roles and have varying levels of responsibility.

Consider that a typical ocean container transport cycle will involve:

- Shipper or Packer loading
- Road, rail and/or inland waterway operators (Pre-carriage)
- Terminals where containers are transferred from one mode of transport to another
- Dock workers when the container is loaded and unloaded
- Ocean transport
- Importer or Consignee unloading

While the transfer of risk is defined by the globally accepted [Incoterms®](#), we'd like to address some best practices meant to diminish these risks and ensure a safe and compliant transport of your product.

Shipper/Packer:

- Plan for the most suitable container to accommodate the cargo (See [CVI Container Specifications](#))
- Prepare a packing plan to ensure that the cargo does not exceed permitted payload limits
- Ensure that the container is in sound condition and free from infestation of plants, plant products, insects or other animals, or that the container is not carrying illegal goods, immigrants, contraband or undeclared or mis-declared cargoes
- Ensure that all placards and signs from the previous consignment are removed from the exterior
- Distribute heavy cargo appropriately over the floor area
- Observe all handling instructions and symbols on the package, i.e., "Do Not Stack"
- Do not stow heavy goods on top of light goods
- For Dangerous Goods, ensure that:
 - All packages are properly marked and labelled
 - All goods are packed according to applicable regulations
 - Required placards, stickers or signs are posted to the exterior of the container
 - Incompatible goods are properly segregated according to regulations
 - No packages are damaged

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- Ensure all voided spaces are filled and appropriate blocking, bracing and lashing is secure
- Verify the gross mass of the container (VGM)
- Affix a seal
- Include the container number, seal number and VGM on all appropriate documents

Consignee/Unpacker:

- Confirm the container number and seal serial number are as shown on the documents
- Check the exterior of the container for signs of leakage or infestation
- Open the container door(s) with care as cargo may have shifted
- Record each package as it is removed and note any damage or exception
- Remove all packing and debris from the container (broom clean)
- Remove all placards and signs regarding the previous consignment from the exterior of the container once it has been cleaned

For a complete guide to CTU transport best practices, see [IMO-ILO-UNECE Code of Practice for Packing Cargo Transport Units \(CTU Code\)](#)

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