



The new SOLAS requirement for verified gross mass of containers

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has adopted amendments to The Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS) in order to enhance maritime safety and reduce dangers throughout ocean freight transports.

The new SOLAS requirement is valid from 1 July 2016. The new rules con every packed export container to have its weight verified before being loaded onto a ship. The new mandatory rules have impact on operational practices globally.

Basic information:

Who is responsible for providing the verified gross mass (VGM)?

The Shipper (named on the ocean bill of lading or sea waybill) is the party responsible for providing the ocean carrier and the terminal operator with the VGM of a packed container.

How to determine the VGM?

There are two methods of verifying the gross mass of a container carrying cargo:

- Method 1: Weighing

After a container has been completely packed, the container can be weighed.

- Method 2: Calculating

All packages and cargo items may be weighted individually, incl. mass of dunnage, packing and securing material and added to tare of the container.

Is there an agreed format?

SOLAS does not mandate any particular form for providing the VGM information. The information of the VGM of the packed container should be conspicuously identified as such and must be part of a shipping document (booking request or shipping instruction) or communicated separately (e.g. declaration including a weight certificate). The document declaring the VGM must be signed by the shipper or a person duly authorised by the shipper. The VGM and signature may be transmitted electronically.

For your convenience, Schenker has created a template (ready to download below). Herewith you have the option to submit the VGM information easily towards Schenker. Just download the respective template, fill in the fields and send back to Schenker representative by e-mail or fax.

Is there a deadline for providing the VGM?

There is no firm deadline set but VGM is required in order to prepare the stowage plan of the ship prior to loading. And without exception, it always remains in the responsibility of the shipper that the carrier and terminal operator receive the information in reasonable time.

In order to ensure your container will be loaded, VGM should be submitted towards Schenker as per following deadlines:

- For FCL: latest at the day, when the container will be loaded at customer's facility (together with the container / seal number).

What are the issues and penalties if VGM is missing?

SOLAS imposes an obligation on the carrier and the terminal operator not to load a packed container aboard a ship without VGM for that container. Compliance with this obligation by the carrier and terminal operator may result in commercial and operational penalties, such as delayed shipment and additional costs if the shipper has not provided the VGM. The penalties may involve repacking costs, administration fees for amending documents, demurrage charges, delayed or cancelled shipments etc