LANTIA
MARÍTIMA

LANTIA RESOURCES

SOLAS Convention

Verified Gross Mass of containers (VGM): what it is, who it affects and how to comply.

BACKGROUND

Why and where does it apply?

An estimated 20% of containers worldwide carry a misdeclared weight.

Incorrect weights do not only lead to poor stowage: they affect port operations and the stability of road and rail transport, and can put the ship, the cargo and the crew at risk. With this regulation, the IMO aims to curb inaccurate declarations and reduce maritime accidents caused by overweight containers.

Since 1 July 2016 it is a breach of the SOLAS Convention to load a packed container onto a ship without a certified VGM. It applies in all IMO member states that are party to the convention.

Obtaining, documenting and sending the VGM to the carrier is the responsibility of the shipper (*shipper*), who may authorise third parties. The shipper is whoever is named as such on the Master Bill of Lading: the seller, the freight forwarder or a third party contracting as principal with the carrier. The carrier is not obliged to check the VGM.

SCOPE

Which container types?

The gross mass verification requirement applies to all packed containers covered by the CSC (*International Convention for Safe Containers*), stowed on a ship subject to SOLAS Chapter VI.

Applies

- **Ocean freight containers**
- **Tank containers**
- **Flat racks**
- **General cargo containers**

Does not apply

Containers on a chassis or trailer driven onto ro-ro ships on short international voyages.

offshore containers not covered by the CSC (MSC/Circ.860, CSC.1/Circ.138/Rev.1).

Units that do not meet the CSC definition of a container.

METHODS

How is the VGM obtained?

With either method, the shipper (or a designated third party) must use weighing equipment approved by the competent authority of the state where packing was completed.

METHOD 1

Weigh the packed container

Once packed and sealed. This is the only method accepted for liquid bulk (flexitanks). If weighed on a road vehicle, the vehicle's tare and fuel must be deducted.

METHOD 2

Weigh all the contents

Weigh all packages, pallets, packing and securing material, and add the container tare shown on its door.

OPTIONS

Where is the container weighed?

1

At the manufacturer’s or exporter’s premises

2

At official weighing facilities

Or at other supply-chain operators (warehouses, hauliers).

3

At port terminals

Authorities recommend obtaining the VGM outside terminals to avoid congestion.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions

Can exporters verify the weight at their own premises?

Yes, provided the weighing systems are calibrated and certified by a laboratory or body accredited by ENAC, or by bodies authorised for metrological control in Spain (Spanish Metrology Centre). This applies to anyone who weighs, including port terminals.

Are estimated VGMs accepted?

No.

Is there an acceptable tolerance?

SOLAS does not set one and leaves it to each country. In Spain, the Merchant Navy Resolution sets the following when two weighings differ:

- Up to 10 tonnes: ±500 kg.
- Over 10 tonnes: ±5%.

If the prior VGM and the port terminal's VGM differ, the terminal's prevails.

DOCUMENTATION

How is the VGM documented?

Once obtained, the VGM must be submitted in a shipping document: shipping instructions, a booking request or a separate document.

THE DOCUMENT MUST INCLUDE AT LEAST

- Name and address of the shipper and of whoever verified the gross mass, if a third party.
- The verified gross mass in kilograms, preceded by “VGM”.
- The method used to obtain the VGM.
- Name and signature (electronic or name in capitals) of the issuer.
- Place and date of signature.

COMMUNICATION

How and when is it sent?

Is electronic submission accepted?

Yes, and it is fast and effective: existing channels can be used, as well as the dedicated VERMAS message.

When must it be sent?

Early enough to prepare the ship's stowage plan. Each carrier sets the deadline (*VGM closing*).

What if a container arrives without a VGM?

It cannot be loaded and stays ashore, as it would if it exceeded the maximum permitted weight. It is a breach of SOLAS, with penalties set by each country and extra handling and terminal storage costs.

IMPACT

What does the rule mean?

Safety: the main goal of the SOLAS Convention.

With declared weights matching actual weights, past problems are avoided. For exporters and importers, however, it means higher logistics costs.

The whole Lantia Marítima team will be glad to help with any questions.

POSSIBLE EXTRA COSTS

- Weighing away from your premises
- Admin work to submit the VGM
- Costs of not submitting the VGM correctly and on time
- Fines
- Port moves
- Additional transport

ANY QUESTIONS?

We are here to help

Lantia Marítima S.L.

Calle Anabel Segura 11, Building B, Ground Floor

28108 Alcobendas, Madrid (Spain)

+34 914 151 611

info@lantiamaritima.com

LANTIA MARÍTIMA