THE SOLAS VGM RULE: - THE CONTAINER WEIGHT RULE APPLICABLE ON JULY 1ST

Overweight containers present a risk to industry workers, vessels, equipment, can upset operational reliability, and produce higher costs. Following a number of serious incidents, the Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the World Shipping Council (trade organizations that represent container liner companies) approved new guidelines with the Verified Gross Mass (VGM) requirement which will come into force on July 1, 2016. The amendment to the international convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) requires the VGM to be documented before containers are loaded on ships. Shippers must physically weigh their goods using one of two prescribed processes:

- Method 1: obtaining the VGM by weighing the container twice, once when empty and then again after loading.
- Method 2: weighing all the contents separately and adding the container tare weight.

Under either method, the weighing equipment used must be certified and meet calibration requirements. The party packing the container cannot use the weight somebody else has provided except for “Individual, original sealed packages that have the accurate weight of the packages, packing contents and cargo items clearly and permanently marked on their surfaces which do not need to be weighed again when they are packed into the container.” e.g. TV’s boxes clearly marked by the manufacturer with the weight stated.

Shippers will be required to declare and verify container weights prior to shipping. If a container is overweight or shippers do not comply with the new regulations, they could face delays, fines and penalties. This is critical to shippers, as they do not want to incur extra costs, delays or upset a customer. Shipper’s associations worldwide are actively working on the implications of this new rule. The following summary provides additional information.

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