World Shipping Council

Containers Lost at Sea 2025 Update

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World Shipping Council Report: Containers Lost at Sea – 2025 Update

Executive Summary

In 2024, an estimated 576 containers were lost at sea out of approximately 250 million transported. While this represents an increase from 221 containers lost at sea in 2023, it remains well below the 10-year average of 1,274.

Container losses in 2024 were influenced by shifting global trade patterns, particularly in response to attacks on merchant shipping in the Red Sea. These disruptions led to a significant rerouting of vessels, with a 191 percent increase in transits around the Cape of Good Hope compared to the previous year. This area is known for hazardous maritime conditions, which contributed to some 200 containers lost in this region in 2024.

The overall trend remains encouraging. Despite occasional spikes, the long-term data continues to show a clear reduction in container losses compared to earlier years.

World Shipping Council remains committed to industry-wide transparency, collaborative safety initiatives, and support for meaningful and cost-effective new international regulations. These efforts, including advocating for mandatory industry-wide container loss reporting, scientific research into loss prevention, and enhanced cargo safety screening, demonstrate a unified focus on making global container shipping as safe and resilient as possible.

Key Findings and Results

- 576 Containers Lost in 2024, out of over 250 million containers transported.

- This equates to just 0.0002 percent of all containers transported.

- While higher than 2023, 2024 losses are still significantly below the 10-year average (1,274 containers/year).

- Trade route changes driving losses: Persistent hostilities in the Red Sea, led to a 191 percent increase in transits around the Cape of Good Hope. The South African Maritime Safety Authority reports indicate nearly 200 containers were lost in this region alone. That accounts for 35 percent of 2024's total container losses.

Spotlight on the Cape of Good Hope

The detour of shipping routes away from the Red Sea meant a large increase in traffic around the Cape of Good Hope. This region is known for its hazardous conditions due to the convergence of weather systems[1], creating unpredictable and steep wave patterns.

In 2024:

- Vessel transits via the Cape rose 191 percent compared to 2023,[2]

- Extreme weather events, especially during the Southern Hemisphere winter, led to disproportionately high losses.

- The South African Maritime Safety Authority reports that around 200 containers were lost around the Cape of Good Hope in 2024.[3] This includes three individual incidents reported of 44, 46 and 99 container losses respectively.

Container Loss Trend

The number of container losses at sea have fluctuated significantly over the 17 years WSC has tracked data, with some extreme outliers skewing the historical average.

The most notable spike occurred in 2013, when 5,578 containers were lost—by far the highest in the dataset and heavily impacted by one incident of total vessel loss. Other years with elevated loss figures include 2020 (3,924) and 2021 (2,301), which were periods marked by several large-scale incidents that prompted industry-wide concern and triggered a research project, TopTier,[4] into the key causes and potential actions to address container loss.

In contrast, 2023 saw a significant reduction with 221 containers lost. In 2024, the total rose to 576 containers, well below the 10-year average of 1,274 and making it one of the lowest annual totals recorded in the past decade. The rolling three-year average covering 2022–2024 is 489, down from 1,061 in the last report covering 2021–2023.

While 2024's reported losses represent an increase from the previous year, the 2024 figure remains consistent with the overall downward trend.
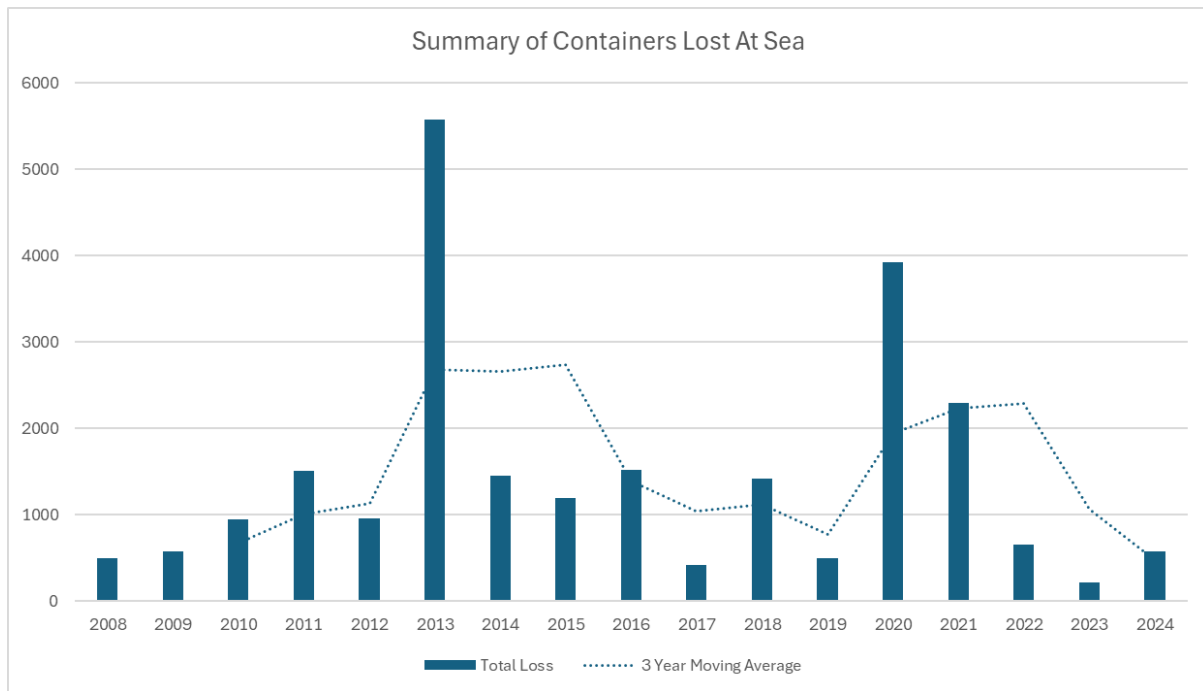
For the second time, container recoveries are included in WSC's annual reporting. In 2024, two containers were recovered.

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[1] https://gard.no/insights/weather-hot-spots-off-south-africa/
[2] Alphaliner, 2025
[3] https://blog.samsa.org.za/2024/09/12/mop-up-underway-of-containers-and-pharmaceutical-bottles-found-on-the-south-african-eastern-coastline-samsa/
[4] https://www.marin.nl/en/jips/toptier

Summary of Containers Lost At Sea

Container Safety: A Shared Responsibility

Every container overboard is one too many, and everyday ocean carriers work with the other parties in the supply chain to enhance safety.

The responsibility for container safety is shared across the supply chain:

- The container operator is responsible for ensuring at the time of dispatch that the container is clean, free from visible pest contamination, and is fit for purpose and complies with applicable requirements. Every party in the supply chain that handles the container is responsible for checking that it is in good condition and remains so, and is free from visible pest contamination.

- The shipper, packer, and freight forwarder are responsible for the container being packed, braced and stowed safely in accordance with the CTU Code,[1] that the contents shipped are safe and free from visible pest contamination, and that the gross mass of the packed container is verified and together with the contents are correctly declared to the carrier in accordance with applicable timelines.

- The port terminal and stevedores are responsible for the proper handling of the container and stowing it properly based on its verified gross mass (VGM), content, and destination in accordance with the ship's Cargo Securing Manual (CSM) as approved by the flag state, and the SOLAS Convention and IMDG Code.

- The vessel operator is responsible, in cooperation with the terminal and any vessel-sharing partners, for arranging for a safe stowage based on the information received, monitoring the stowage, and securing the containers safely in accordance with the CSM and , where required, ensuring containers are segregated.

How the cargo is packed and stowed in the container by the exporter, consignor or shipper is key to safe transport, both on sea and on land. The most effective way for the cargo tendering party to prevent losses is to make sure that cargo is conscientiously and correctly packed, declared

and placarded, and its weight verified in accordance with the SOLAS Convention, IMDG Code, and the CTU Code. To facilitate this, the Cargo Integrity Group, where WSC is a founding member, has developed a short CTU Code Guide and a practical Container Packing Checklist to make the information in the CTU Code more accessible and easier to use for all parties in the supply chain.

The content and gross mass of the containers are crucial information when loading the vessel. Containers are stowed according to the cargo stowage plan to ensure a balanced vessel (e.g., heaviest containers at the bottom of the stack and the lightest on top) and to minimize risks (e.g., cargo categorized as flammable placed away from crew quarters, fuel tanks and other flammable cargo).

Container vessels are designed to transport containers safely and many precautions are taken to avoid containers being lost or dislodged, even when under extreme stress. Lashing software is used to design a stowage plan, and then containers are secured pursuant to the stowage plan in the hold in racks and secured with steel bars and locks, as are containers stowed on deck. These arrangements, including lashing gear, must be inspected and maintained for safety. When planning the journey, operations

 centers on land together with the vessel master and crew must plan for it to be as safe as possible, using weather routing before and during the journey to avoid dangerous conditions by adjusting the vessels' route or speed where required.

Actions and Initiatives

Mandatory container loss reporting to the International Maritime Organizations starts in 2026

As a longtime advocate for mandatory reporting of containers lost at sea, World Shipping Council welcomed the adoption of amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) by the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Maritime Safety Committee (MSC 108). The entire industry must now report all containers lost at sea starting January 1, 2026.

The new IMO regulations, specifically amending SOLAS Chapter V Regulations 31 and 32, mark a significant advancement in maritime safety and environmental protection. By ensuring prompt and detailed reporting of lost and drifting containers, these amendments will enhance navigational safety, facilitate swift response actions, and mitigate potential environmental hazards.

WSC will continue reporting on behalf of its members alongside IMO requirements to ensure consistency, transparency and comparison.

Industry project researching solutions to prevent container loss to conclude this year

The World Shipping Council, as a key participant in the Top Tier Joint Industry Project (JIP), continues to support collaborative efforts to reduce container losses at sea through a science-based, data-driven approach. Launched in July 2021 and led by the Maritime Research Institute Netherlands (MARIN), the TopTier initiative brings together over 40 stakeholders including flag states, shipping companies, classification societies, and equipment manufacturers. Major

progress has been made identifying the main reasons for container losses, developing tools and training to help ocean carriers and seafarers prevent incidents, as well as recommendations to IMO for regulations and to the ISO for standards that would significantly enhance container safety.

The project has now come to an end, but will submit a final report with actionable recommendations to IMO (CCC 11 in September). The outcomes of the JIP will thus directly support the work of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and broader industry safety initiatives to minimize the loss of containers at sea. The World Shipping Council is committed to this partnership, aiming to ensure that findings from the project lead to tangible, practical improvements in container shipping safety.

WSC Cargo Safety Program to flag mis/undeclared dangerous goods to prevent ship fires and container loss

Ship fires can endanger crew and cause loss of cargo or even the loss of an entire vessel. Recent reports have shown that a leading cause of these fires is mis/undeclared dangerous goods.[5]

To address the risk of container fires on ships, WSC in partnership with the National Cargo Bureau (NCB), has developed the WSC Cargo Safety Program - introducing the first-ever industry-wide best practices for cargo screening and inspections. Supported by advanced digital tools, the system will evaluate cargo booking information against safety regulations and use artificial intelligence to continuously refine its risk algorithms, enhancing detection capabilities over time. The program will be fully launched this year and will screen millions of container bookings globally, setting a new benchmark for maritime safety and proactive risk management.

Charcoal shipment regulations are changing to make transportation safer, protecting crew and cargo

To further tackle the issue of ship fires, the shipping industry is taking proactive steps to implement improved safety measures for transporting charcoal, in advance of the mandatory IMO regulations coming into effect in 2026.

The new regulations require all charcoal shipments to be declared as dangerous goods under the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code. There are also new treatment, packing and stowage requirements for shipments of charcoal. Treating all charcoal as dangerous goods ensures uniform safety standards and gives everyone involved – from shippers to carriers – the tools and clarity needed to prevent future tragedies.

WSC has been instrumental in negotiating and developing these significant improvements to international regulations. Due to a series of devastating fires caused by improperly handled charcoal, ocean carriers have already been implementing the new tighter regulations in 2025.

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[5] https://commercial.allianz.com/news-and-insights/news/safety-shipping-review-2025.html

ANNEX One: Survey Methodology

In each of the surveys conducted in 2011, 2014, 2017, and 2020 the WSC member companies were asked to report the number of containers lost overboard for the preceding three years. Since 2021, WSC reports container losses on an annual basis.

Up to date data on the number of containers lost at sea is important for the work under way to increase safety and help guide the need for any additional initiatives by WSC, governments and other parties.

All WSC member companies responded, representing approximately 90 percent of the total global vessel container capacity deployed at the time of the survey. WSC assumes for the purpose of its analysis that the container losses for the 10 percent of the industry's capacity that is operated by carriers that did not participate in the survey would be roughly proportional to the losses reported by the responding carriers representing 90 percent of the industry's capacity. Based on this assumption, the total annual figure reported by WSC members is adjusted upward to provide an estimated loss figure for all carriers, both WSC members and non-members, to arrive at an estimate of total containers lost.