

SOLAS : Safety of life at sea , is a very important international maritime treaty necessitating minimum standards for the construction , equipment and operations of merchant vessels. The SOLAS convention has been amended by the international Maritime Organisation (IMO) to tackle the hazard of mis-declared cargo weight affecting safety of human lives merchandise and vessels.



17 June 2013

Make a wish – The top spot would certainly need to be taken by the MOL Comfort.

Just off the coast of Yemen, the vessel was on it's way to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from Singapore. Loaded with the equivalent of 7041 twenty foot containers (it's capacity was 8110), this 316m long container ship suffered a crack amidship (in the middle of the ship) during bad weather. The vessel eventually broke in two, with both parts sinking. Prior to sinking, however, one of the pieces caught spectacularly on fire.





Improperly loading of the vessel, mis-declared container weights and incorrect stability calculations were all given as possible causes for this catastrophic accident. Investigators working on this dramatic event concluded that the cause was indeed:

- Buckling of the bottom shell plating due to hull girder loads exceeding the hull girder strength
- Fatigue cracking of welded structure

All sister ships of the MOL Comfort were subsequently checked for faults and repaired.



International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention,

Chapter VI Regulation 2 – Cargo information regarding mandatory Verification of the gross mass of a container carrying cargo together with associated guidelines published as MSC.1/Circ. 1475.

Effective 1st July 2016, all loaded containers are required to have a Verified Gross Mass (VGM) declared by shippers.

Starting 1st July 2016, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) will enforce globally the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention requirements regarding the verification of the gross weight of packed containers.

NO VGM = NO LOAD

What does it mean to provide a loaded Container Verified Gross Mass (VGM)?

The VGM is the certified Gross Cargo weight (including weight of all packing material & dunnage) plus container tare weight.

There are two methods for the Shipper to calculate the VGM:

Method 1: Weigh a packed & sealed container on a weighing bridge/device.

Method 2: Computing the VGM by using a Verified Cargo Weight (including packing materials) and adding the container tare weight.

Why is VGM needed?

This is a global IMO SOLAS mandatory regulatory requirement to avoid accidents due to wrong vessel stowage. VGM is used for vessel planning and safe stowage.

What happens if VGM cannot be provided?

Cargo will not be loaded. NO VGM = NO LOAD! There may be Terminals not accepting to gate in if a (inland) transport company cannot provide a VGM. All associated costs with shut out / re-nomination / weighing / return of cargo, etc will be for Shipper's account.

Shipping line Internal process will be set up whereby we will check/confirm submission of VGM. Final check will be required prior to data submission to Terminal and Vessel Operator. If not provided at that time then EDI data submission will Advise same with instruction to the Terminal not to load until VGM confirmed. In many cases Terminal will not load anyway if no VGM has been provided.

Who is responsible to provide the VGM?

The SOLAS regulation stipulates that the Shipper is responsible to provide the VGM to relevant parties (Terminal and Carrier). There is no requirement for either the Carrier or the Terminal to have a VGM checked, verified, certified or reweighed.

The Carrier is also not responsible to verify whether correct method/certification has been used by the Shipper.

Under the SOLAS requirements, the shipper named on the ocean bill of lading is the party responsible for providing the maritime (ocean) carrier ('master') and the terminal operator ('terminal representative') with the verified gross mass of a packed container.

What is the date of implementation?

VGM data is required for all cargo loaded on/after 1st of July 2016. The recent IMO circular has provided clarification on how to handle Transshipment cargo per following:

- for Transshipment cargo loaded at origin/first load port prior to 1 July 2016 which will then tranships on/after 1 July 2016, VGM data is not required.
- for Transshipment cargo loaded at origin/first load port on/after 1 July 2016, VGM data is required.

The IMO Circular released also advises that National authorities should adopt a 'practical and pragmatic approach' when verifying compliance during the initial 3 month period allowing stakeholders to refine, if necessary, procedures for documenting, communicating and sharing VGM data.

When is VGM required?

VGM is required prior to any container shipment. Cargo will not be loaded onto a vessel unless a certified VGM has been provided by the Shipper.

Actual cut off time will vary by port / terminal or inland CY / port and is likely to be either:

- Current/existing CY cargo cut-off time at the Terminal (including inland, CY and rail) or
- Prior to / during Terminal Gate In It is therefore important that the Shipper finalises the VGM data at the time of or prior to cargo leaving Shipper's premises and that VGM data is provided to the Carrier and/or Terminal in a timely manner.

For Marine Terminals that require to have the VGM prior Gate In or latest at the time of gate-in then the Shipper should ensure that VGM data has been supplied prior to arriving at the Terminal gate to avoid the risk of not being allowed to enter the Terminal. All costs associated with mitigating this problem are to be borne by Shipper.

SHIPPERS LETTER HEAD

INFORMATION ABOUT VERIFIED GROSS MASS OF CONTAINER

Sr. No.	Details of Information	Particulars
1*	Name of the shipper	
2*	Shipper Registration/License No. (IEC No/CIN No) **	
3*	Name and designation of official of the shipper authorised to sign document	
4*	24 x 7 contact details of authorised official of shipper	
5*	Container No.	
6*	Container Size (TEU/FEU/other)	
7*	Maximum permissible weight of container as per the CSC Plate	
8*	Weighbridge registration no. & Address of Weighbridge.	
9*	Verified gross mass of container (method-1/method-2)	
10*	Date and time of weighing	
11*	Weighing slip no	
12	Type .(Normal/Reefer/Hazardo.us/others)	
13	If Hazardous, UN No, IMDG class	

Signature of authorized person of shipper

Name:

Designation:

Date:

Remarks

* Indicates mandatory fields

** Shipper not having IEC No. or CIN No. may provide information as follows:

Company - PAN NO.Individuals

India National - AADHAR No.

Foreign National - PASSPORT No. & Country of Issue of Passport

VERIFIED GROSS MASS (VGM) DECLARATION FORM

Sr. No.	Details of Information	Particulars
1.	Name of the Shipper	
2.	Shipper Registration/ License No. (IEC No. CIN No.) **	
3.	Name and designation of official of the shipper authorized to sign document	
4.	24X7 contact details of authorized official of shipper	
5.	Shipping Bill No.	
6.	Cargo Type (LCL/FCL)	
7.	Commodity Description	
8.	No of Packages	
9.	Final Destination	
10.	Cargo Weight	
11.	Weight of Packing Materials / Pallet weight etc...	
12.	Total Weight	
13.	Remarks	

I certify that I am the authorized signatory of the shipper (as stated on the House Bill of Lading) and the statements made and all information contained herein are true and correct. We understand that civil and criminal penalties may be imposed for making false and fraudulent statements herein, failing to provide the requested information or for violation of SOLAS.

The shipper shall indemnify "Name of the Consolidator", their employees, subcontractors, agents or anyone involved in the carriage of these goods and hold them harmless in respect of any liability, loss, damage or expense of whatsoever nature (including container reworking cost) resulting from the inaccuracy or inadequacy of the information provided.

Signature of authorized person of the shipper

Date : _____

Remarks:

* Shippers not having IEC No. or CIN no. may provide information as follows:

Company : Copy of PAN Card.

Individuals : Indian National: - Copy of Aadhar Card.

Foreign National: - Copy of Passport.