
Sea container cleanliness

Invasive pests hitchhike around the globe in and on the agricultural products we import. They also travel on and in the millions of rail wagons, trailers and sea cargo containers that crisscross our oceans and continents on trains, trucks and ships. Once introduced, invasive pests are very difficult and expensive to control or eradicate. They can severely damage agricultural production, affect property values, and reduce water availability and quality. The total cost of lost revenue and clean-up can run into billions of dollars.

The North American Sea Container Initiative

To protect North American agriculture, forestry and natural resources against the introduction of invasive pests and diseases, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) have worked with U.S. and Canadian border protection agencies, shippers, and global shipping companies to develop the following guidance for cleaning and inspecting sea containers. This guidance complements the International Maritime Organization's Code of Practice for Packing Cargo Transport Units (CTU Code). Everyone involved in moving containers has an opportunity to protect our crops, forests, and livestock by ensuring that containers and their cargo are free from unwanted plants, plant products, insects, snails, soil, animals and animal droppings.

Impact of Invasive Pests on Trade

Invasive pests threaten crops, forests, and livestock. They also have a very real impact on trade. When a contaminated container is found in port, the cargo owner, importer, or shipper can expect:

- delayed cargo release
- demurrage charges due to cargo holds, and
- unexpected costs associated with having the container quarantined, tarped and treated, cleaned, or re-exported back to origin at the cargo owner's expense

By taking reasonable steps to keep containers and their cargo clean, you will help prevent the spread of invasive pests through commerce and facilitate the movement of your containers through North American ports. As a result, you may experience:

- reduced port-of-entry inspections
- faster cargo release, and
- fewer unexpected expenses, such as demurrage charges due to cargo holds or costs associated with having your container quarantined, tarped and treated, cleaned, or re-exported back to origin

Recommended Self-Inspection Practices for Industry

The risk for pests to contaminate containers and cargo is greatest at the packing location. Shippers or packers acting on behalf of shippers should put measures in place to minimize pest contamination during packing. Others in the supply chain should also put measures in place to reduce the risk of pest contamination while the container is in their control. These measures should be in accordance with individual roles and responsibilities in the supply chain and should take into consideration all safety and operational constraints.

Measures may include:

- Visually inspect the outside and inside of the sea container for contaminants such as plants, seeds, insects, egg masses, snails, animals, animal droppings, and soil.
- Where required, sweep, vacuum, or wash containers before loading to remove potential contaminants. Be aware that environmental factors, such as heavy rains, may increase the likelihood of certain types of contamination.
- Ensure cargo packed into the sea container is clean and free of visible contaminants.
- Clear the cargo staging and packing area to ensure that it is free from plants and visible plant pests. Containers placed on grassy areas may be more vulnerable to contamination by insects and snails.
- Do not keep containers under bright lights, which will attract insects to the cargo staging area and increase the likelihood of contamination. If containers must be kept under bright lights, check them regularly for signs of insects and egg masses and clean containers as needed to remove these contaminants.
- Where appropriate, use baits, traps, or barriers to keep pests out of the cargo staging and packing area. For example, you can use a salt barrier to prevent snail infestations.
- When moving containers between animal production facilities:
 - Avoid driving containers through manure or wastewater.
 - Whenever possible, park containers on paved areas and away from livestock pens and pastures.
 - Where applicable, sweep, vacuum, or wash containers to remove contaminants, such as soil or animal droppings, that could move animal disease from one location to another.

For More Information

To learn more about the North American Sea Container Initiative, visit the following links:

- United States: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/nasci>
- Canada: <http://inspection.gc.ca/plants/plant-pests-invasive-species/sea-container-cleanliness/eng/1508779809618/1508779809944>

To view industry standards for packing and cleaning containers, visit the following links:

- Joint Industry Guidelines for Cleaning of Containers: <http://www.worldshipping.org/industry-issues/safety/joint-industry-guidelines-for-cleaning-of-containers>
- International Maritime Organization's Code of Practice for Packing Cargo Transport Units (CTU Code): <http://www.unece.org/trans/wp24/guidelinespackingctus/intro.html>