

## **Are we ready for the new container weight rules?**

### **Murray King**

Some months ago I wrote about the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) decision to require that all loaded containers in international trade should have their weight verified, so called Verified Gross Mass or VGM. Up until now the obligation to declare the weight has not always been accurately complied with. So the IMO has introduced mechanisms by which the weight is independently verified, either by weighing the laden container itself ("Method 1"), or adding the weight of all the packages and dunnage to the container's tare to get a total weight ("Method 2"). Either way, the weight must have been measured on trade legal machines. The onus to declare the verified weights is on shippers, that is consignors or container packers.

The new rules come into force in less than a month, on July 1. Ports in New Zealand are imposing the rules early, from 15 June, to iron out any problems ahead of the deadline. From that date, they will not accept any export containers without a verified and certified weight. Import containers will be the responsibility of the exporting country. While the rules do not cover roll-on, roll-off ferries like those across Cook Strait, ports are applying them to coastal lift-on, lift-off ships that use the container terminals.

This is a world-wide initiative to make shipping safer. Misdeclared containers had been implicated in several ship sinkings. It has the force of law for those countries that have signed the Safety of Life at Sea convention (SOLAS). That's 162 countries, including New Zealand, or more importantly countries representing 99% of the world's tonnage. Our Maritime New Zealand has recently amended the relevant Maritime Rule (Part 24B) to reflect the new rules.

In the United States and Europe shippers have been up in arms about the perceived hasty pace of the change, claiming they are not ready. In the US they called for a delay in implementation. There has however been plenty of notice of the change, and regulatory agencies are standing firm. The Coastguard in the US has nevertheless declared that following existing rules will be enough to comply. Those rules mandate weighing at the port if it has not been done earlier.

In late May the IMO, following a Maritime NZ initiative, put out a circular calling for a "practical and pragmatic" approach, which gave some of the protestors some comfort. Yet in reality the IMO made no concession on the rules or their start date, except for containers loaded on a ship before the deadline (without a VGM) and transhipped to another ship after the deadline; and to allow time for refining procedures for documenting, communicating, and sharing the weight information. For these issues the IMO suggests three months of pragmatism on the part of local marine safety authorities.

For most exports we in New Zealand are originators of the laden container. There is not much comfort in the IMO circular for us, and the ports as literally the gatekeepers are firm with their "no VGM, no entry" stance. The ports in general will not offer a weighing service, although some container parks may do so.

So how ready are we? A quick (and admittedly unscientific) survey of the transport industry indicates that the major exporters are ready for the change. That is unsurprising, as most would have standardised packages and find Method 2 easy to implement; or they might have their own weighbridges, or have invested in modern equipment such a trade-legal sensors on forklifts or trucks.

Smaller exporters might not be so ready. They will be more dependent on public weighbridges and there are concerns that there are not enough of them that are suitable, and so they will be under

pressure, leading to delays in the export chain. Remember that the weighing machines must be trade-legal and certified under the Weights and Measures Act 1987, so backyard ingenuity is not going to help. Such firms might like to consider investing in simple but certified weighing devices like corner jacks. Simply turning up unannounced at the port gate won't work.

Will there be chaos at our ports, like that predicted overseas? With major exporters compliant the problem should be small, but truck queues might be longer for a while if smaller exporters don't get their act together. Trucking companies would be wise not to carry a container headed for a port if the VGM is not in place.

More information is available on the UK TT Club and Maritime NZ websites:

[http://www.ttclub.com/loss-prevention/container-weighing/?dm\\_i=2RU,496XF,GCHOW7,FJAGQ,1](http://www.ttclub.com/loss-prevention/container-weighing/?dm_i=2RU,496XF,GCHOW7,FJAGQ,1)

<http://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/Commercial/Shipping-safety/cargo/container-weight.asp>

### **Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport**

The Health and Safety in Transport seminar I mentioned last time is now likely to be held in the second week of November, the day before the Ministry of Transport's Transport Knowledge conference. We are also going to offer shorter one- and two-day versions of our successful Leaders for the Future courses, which will be cheaper and easier to attend than the long course (which will still be offered too). Details on both these can be had from Marilyn Henderson, [info@cilt.co.nz](mailto:info@cilt.co.nz).