

House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation

Summary of Subject Matter

April 14, 2016 Hearing

“Maritime Transportation Safety and Stewardship Programs”

Excerpt. [Click here for full Summary.](#)

Vessel Container Weights

In 2014, the IMO’s Maritime Safety Committee approved changes to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) 2 , Regulation VI-2 – Cargo Information, to require verification of container weights before containers can be loaded onto ships. The requirement comes into effect on July 1, 2016. Under the requirement, all packed shipping containers must be accompanied by a signed, shipping document that lists the verified gross mass of each container before they can be loaded onto a ship operated by a flag state that is a party to SOLAS Convention (See Appendix D for more information on SOLAS and IMO).

There are two allowable methods by which to determine a container’s weight — weighing the container after it is packed or weighing all the cargo and contents of the container and adding that weight to the container’s tare weight (e.g. the weight of the container empty).

On March 14, 2016, a group of 49 shipping industry representatives sent a letter to the Coast Guard to relay concerns that carriers may interpret the new regulation to require a shipper to certify both the cargo and the carrier’s container. The shippers state that implementing the SOLAS regulation in this way is “contrary to the practical realities of our United States export maritime commerce and fundamentally flawed conceptually.” The letter supported the views expressed by Coast Guard Rear Admiral Paul Thomas whereby he indicated that should a shipper provide the cargo mass weight and the carrier add the tare weight of the container, the intent of the requirement would be achieved. The Coast Guard has stated that United States carriers currently comply with SOLAS. Consequently, the Coast Guard is not requiring domestic shippers to make changes in existing practices.

The Coast Guard will also continue to ensure SOLAS compliance aboard foreign flagged ships via port state control examinations. This action will not change with the implementation of the July 1, 2016 requirements. The Coast Guard has stated it does not intend to initiate a rulemaking or to issue policy guidance to industry on the implementation of the amendments, unless there is a demonstrated need to ensure SOLAS compliance.