

Common Export Documents
When it comes to? selling and shipping your products outside of the United States, there are standard documents used for exporting.

Common Export Documents

To know which ?documents ?are ?needed ?for an export shipment, the? best ?place to start ?is? your foreign ? customer/importer or a ?freight forwarder.? By obtaining correct information, you are helping your customer? efficiently? clear the goods with customs in the target market.? Below is a list of Common Export Documents. Some products/shipments may require special export documents. More information: Special Export Documents.

Common Export Documents

Pro Forma Invoice?

A pro forma invoice is an important ?document used as a negotiating tool between the seller and the buyer prior to an export shipment. This document should be used ?by the seller to quote ?at the beginning of an export transaction and it will eventually become the ?final ?commercial invoice? used when goods are cleared through customs in the ?importing ?country. The document ?contains a description of goods (e.g., quantity, price, weight, kind, and other specifications) ?and ?is a declaration by the seller to provide the products and services to the buyer? at ?the specified date and price.?? More information: Pro Forma Invoice?.

Commercial Invoice?

The commercial invoice is a legal document between the? exporter ?and the ?buyer (in this case, the foreign buyer)? that clearly ?states the ?goods ?being sold?and the amount ?the customer?is to pay. The commercial invoice is one of the main documents used by customs in determining customs duties.? A commercial invoice is a bill for the goods from the seller to the buyer. These? documents are often used by governments to determine the true value of goods when assessing customs duties. Governments that use the commercial invoice to control imports will often specify its form, content, number of copies, language to be used and other characteristics.?? More information: Commercial Invoice**?**.

Packing List?

Considerably more detailed and informative than a standard domestic packing list, an export packing list lists seller, buyer, shipper, invoice number, date of shipment, mode of transport, carrier, and itemizes quantity, description, type of package, such as a box, crate, drum, or carton, the number of packages, total net and gross weight (in kilograms), package marks and dimensions, if appropriate. Both commercial stationers and freight forwarders carry packing list forms. A packing list may serve as conforming document. It is not a substitute for a commercial invoice. In addition, U.S. and foreign customs officials may use the packing list to check the cargo? so ?the commercial invoice? should ?reflect the information shown on the?packing list. More information: Packing List?. ??

Certification of Origin

Standard Shipments

Required by some countries. A signed statement as to the origin of the export item. Certificates of origin are usually validated by a semiofficial organization, such as a local chamber of commerce. A certificate may be required even if the commercial invoice contains the same information. For information on Generic Certificates of origin and where to obtain them read an article on read an article on Special Export Documents.

Free Trade Agreements Shipments

For information on how to certify your product for benefits (e.g. duty-free) shipped to free trade agreements partner countries, including the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, read the article on Special Export Documents and USMCA.

Transportation Documents?

Air Waybill?

Air freight shipments require airway bills. ?An airway?bill accompanies goods shipped by an international air carrier. The document? provides ?detailed information about the shipment and allows?it to be tracked.? Air waybills are shipper-specific ?and are not negotiable documents (as opposed to “order” bills of lading used for vessel shipments).?

Bill of Lading?

A bill of lading is a contract between the owner of the goods and the carrier (as with domestic shipments). For? ocean shipments, there are two?common?types: a straight bill of lading, which is non-negotiable, and a negotiable,?or shipper’s order bill of lading. The latter can be?used to ?buy, sell?, or trade the goods ?while ?in transit. The customer usually needs an original? bill of lading ?as proof of ownership to take possession of the goods ?from the ocean carrier.??

Export Compliance Documents ?

The Foreign Trade Regulations 15CFR Part 30 requires that Electronic Export Information (EEI) shall be filed through the Automated Export System (AES) by the United States Principal Party In Interest (USPPI)[the exporter], or an authorized agent of the USPPI or Foreign Principal Party In Interest (FPPI) for all exports of physical goods, including shipments moving pursuant to orders received over the Internet when the value of the commodity classified under each individual Schedule B number is over $2,500, or if there exists a mandatory filing requirement, i.e., an export license is required. See Foreign Trade Regulation 30.2(a)(1)(iv).??

A complete guide to filing electronic export information in the Automated Commercial Environment (AESDirect) is an excellent resource. See? EEI and?AESDirect. To sign up and log into the ACE system directly, visit the portal at U.S. Customs and Border Protection. ?

*Note: The EEI is required from persons exporting goods from the United States, Puerto Rico, Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs) located in the United States or Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, between Puerto Rico and the

United States, and to the U.S. Virgin Islands from the United States or Puerto Rico.

There are instances when the EEI is not required, such as the following examples:

- When the value of the commodity classified under each individual Schedule B number is $2,500 or less and mandatory EEI filing is not required.

- Shipments FROM the U.S. to Canada of ANY amount and mandatory EEI filing is not required.

- Shipments TO U.S. possessions, except those territories where EEI filing is required, i.e., between the US and Puerto Rico and from the US to the US Virgin Islands). See the exemptions listed on the eCFR website for a list of exemptions.

?U.S. Principal Party in Interest (USPPI)?

The USPPI, ?a required field in the EEI as defined in the Foreign Trade Regulations ("FTR"), is the person in the United States that receives the primary benefit, monetary or otherwise, of the export transaction. See ecfr.gov for scenarios involving the types of USPPIs.

Export Licenses?

An ?export license ?is a government document that authorizes the export of specific goods in specific quantities to a particular destination?for a particular end-use. This document may be required for most or all exports to some countries or for other countries only under special circumstances. Examples of export-license certificates include those issued by the? U.S.?Department of Commerce's? Bureau of Industry and Security ?(dual use articles), the? State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls?(defense articles), the? Nuclear Regulatory Commission?(nuclear materials), and the? U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration?(controlled substances and precursor chemicals).??

Destination Control Statement?

A ?Destination Control Statement ?(DCS?found in part?758.6 of the BIS Export Administration Regulations, or EAR) is required for exports from the United States for items on the Commerce Control List that are outside of EAR99 (products for which no license is required) or controlled under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR). A DCS appears on the commercial invoice, ocean bill of lading, or airway bill to notify the carrier and all foreign parties that the item can be exported only to certain destinations. For more information, visit the Bureau of Industry and Security website.

Note

Depending on the type of product, nature of transaction (i.e. standard or temporary shipment), and destination country, you may be required to submit additional export documentation. This could include a generic or FTA certificate of origin, ATA Carnet, letter of credit, or other documentation. For more information, see Special

Documents Used in Export Transactions.

Also, visit the Country Commercial Guides prepared by our in-country trade exports at U.S. embassies abroad. Each guide includes chapters on how to do business with a particular country. Among the chapters are “Selling U.S. Goods and Services,” and “Customs Regulations and Standards” section which highlights the requirements and documentation for a particular country of interest. See an example for shipment to China.

Special Export Documents

Documents not falling under the category of “commonly used” (e.g., commercial invoice, bill of lading, packing list) are covered here. The country of import may require special documents for a variety of reasons. Certain products may require certificates to show cleanliness, compliance with standards, safety, and health.
Other products may require pre-shipment inspections before departing the country of export or be qualified for a free trade agreement tariff rate. Asking the foreign buyer at the beginning of the transaction which documents will be needed for goods to clear customs in the country of import is a best practice. Read the article on Special Export Documents.

Additional information on shipping documentation for a particular trading partner is included in the **Country Commercial Guides** prepared by our in-country trade exports at U.S. embassies abroad. Each guide includes chapters on how to do business with a particular country. Among the chapters are “Selling U.S. Goods and Services” and the “Customs Regulations and Standards” section, which highlights the requirements and documentation for a particular country of interest. For example, note the information on special export documents in the Mexico Country Commercial Guide.

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Global Business Navigator Chatbot Beta

Welcome to the Global Business Navigator, an artificial intelligence (AI) Chatbot from the International Trade Administration (ITA). This tool, currently in beta version testing, is designed to provide general information on the exporting process and the resources available to assist new and experienced U.S. exporters. The Chatbot, developed using Microsoft’s Azure AI services, is trained on ITA’s export-related content and aims to quickly get users the information they need. The Chatbot is intended to make the benefits of exporting more accessible by understanding non-expert language, idiomatic expressions, and foreign languages.

Limitations

As a beta product, the Chatbot is currently being tested and its responses may occasionally produce inaccurate or incomplete information. The Chatbot is trained to decline out of scope or inappropriate requests. The Chatbot’s knowledge is limited to the public information on the Export Solutions web pages of Trade.gov, which covers a wide range of topics on exporting. While it cannot provide responses specific to a company’s product or a specific foreign market, its reference pages will guide you to other relevant government resources and market research. Always double-check the Chatbot’s responses using the provided references or by visiting the Export Solutions web pages on Trade.gov. Do not use its responses as legal or professional advice. Inaccurate advice

from the Chatbot would not be a defense to violating any export rules or regulations.

Privacy

The Chatbot does not collect information about users and does not use the contents of users' chat history to learn new information. All feedback is anonymous. Please do not enter personally identifiable information (PII), sensitive, or proprietary information into the Chatbot. Your conversations will not be connected to other interactions or accounts with ITA. Conversations with the Chatbot may be reviewed to help ITA improve the tool and address harmful, illegal, or otherwise inappropriate questions.

Translation

The Chatbot supports a wide range of languages. Because the Chatbot is trained in English and responses are translated, you should verify the translation. For example, the Chatbot may have difficulty with acronyms, abbreviations, and nuances in a language other than English.