

# Watch Out for that Load! - Safe Container Loading Practices

By NEIL CHAMBERS, Director – Container Transport Alliance Australia

Poor cargo loading and inadequate cargo restraint inside shipping containers can be a “hidden menace” to Australian road safety and cargo handling safety, not to mention an insurance industry nightmare.

As an importer, how are you making sure that the way in which your suppliers overseas pack cargo into shipping containers will meet Australia’s road and workers safety laws when they arrive, as well as international shipping requirements while in transit by sea?

Conversely, as an exporter, what instructions and training are you giving to those who pack your containers safely for landside distribution to container terminals, and for their vessel voyage to the port of destination?

Are your Dangerous Goods (DG) packed, labelled and declared correctly?

Over 80% of containers through Australia’s capital city ports are



transported by road, with a current estimate of over 3 million truck trips per annum carrying full containers to and from ports. With the forecast rise in the container freight task to 2032/2033, the number of truck trips is predicted to more than double to over 7 million trips per annum.

Under the Chain of Responsibility (CoR) provisions of Australia’s heavy vehicle road safety laws, importers and exporters, and any intermediaries such as freight forwarders, have obligations to ensure that their actions (or inactions) do not contribute to a breach of the laws. This includes taking practical steps to ensure that cargo inside shipping containers is packed and restrained so as not to cause a breach of road laws when the containers are transported on a public road.

You can’t abrogate these legal responsibilities. Yes, heavy vehicle drivers and transport operators have the prime responsibility to ensure that heavy vehicles are not overloaded, and that cargo is adequately restrained (including inside shipping containers).

Particularly however in the case of an accident where a safety investigation is launched, importers, exporters, forwarders and others might well find themselves being prosecuted for failing to take reasonable steps to meet their CoR obligations. And, the penalties are now steep – for the most serious offences up to \$3m for Corporations, and up to \$300,000 and/or 5 years’ imprisonment for individuals.

They might not be widely reported in the mainstream media, or indeed not even necessarily in the trade media, but there are more road accidents and container logistics chain worker injuries attributable to poorly packed and restrained cargoes inside shipping containers than you might imagine.

Just recently in January this year, a worker died in Victoria after a stack of 3.6-tonne panels fell on him as they were being unloaded from a shipping container. Likewise, in 2019 there were several truck rollovers in NSW, Victoria and elsewhere, where a significant contributing factor was likely to have





been load-shift within the shipping container.

Don't forget the commercial losses that can be suffered either. One of the largest marine insurers in the World, TT Club, reports that 55% of containerised cargo claims are caused by poorly or unsecured loads, 12% from mis-declared dangerous cargo, and 8% due to overloading.

To raise the awareness of the vital need for safe container loading practices, Container Transport Alliance Australia (CTAA), in conjunction with Freight & Trade Alliance (FTA) and the Australian Peak Shippers Association (APSA), have received Australian Commonwealth funding, through the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR), to develop and



deliver learning and awareness building tools.

There are existing best practice guidance materials that should be better known and utilised. These include the Australian Load Restraint Guide, the International Code of Practice for Packing of Cargo

Transport Units (known as the CTU Code), as well as the International and Australian Dangerous Goods Codes.

The **CTAA / FTA / APSA Safe Container Loading Practices campaign** will include online learning materials (being developed in conjunction with the **WiseTech Global Academy**), and checklists for importers & exporters. **Awareness seminars are planned to be rolled out mid-2020 in all of Australia's capital city container ports, and in selected strategic regional hubs.**

The aims are to promote best practice, to raise awareness of the risks in the supply chain from poorly loaded and poorly restrained cargoes inside shipping containers, and to ensure that all parties in the chain fully appreciate their legal responsibilities towards safety.

