

Reefer claims loss prevention

A loss prevention America Focus publication

Phase 4 – The Reefer container at the Port of Loading



When the reefer container arrives at the rail terminal, off dock terminal or port of loading, the temperature setting, return air temperature and vent setting should be checked against the booking information supplied by the shipping line and the trucker's paperwork. The container yard personnel should inform the shipping line if the temperature displayed on an operating refrigerated container is not decreasing to the shipper specified thermostat setting in a reasonable period of time.



In some instances, refrigerated containers are not operating when received at the container yard due to insufficient fuel or a decision not to use motor generator sets for short stays. When a non-operating refrigerated container is encountered, the container should be connected to a source of electrical power as soon as possible. The performance of the operating refrigerated containers should be monitored closely to assure they are maintaining the temperature at or about the shipper specified thermostat setting.

Guidelines for Receiving Frozen Cargo

The generally recommended upper pulp temperature limit for accepting frozen cargo is -9.4C ($+15\text{F}$). The importance of holding frozen cargo below -9.4C ($+15\text{F}$) is that food spoilage organisms cease to grow. When the terminal or shipping line becomes aware of a frozen cargo container running at or above this limit for an extended period of time, the shipper should be informed and arrangements made to inspect the cargo by a qualified surveyor.

Guidelines for Receiving Chilled Cargo

The generally recommended upper pulp temperature limit for accepting fresh fruits and vegetables is 5C (41F) which is an acceptable benchmark for imposing a significant barrier to the growth of bacterial food organisms. When the terminal or shipping line becomes aware of a chilled cargo container running at or above this limit for an extended period of time, the shipper should be informed and arrangements made to inspect the cargo by a qualified surveyor.

As we pointed out in Phase 3 “Loading of the Refrigerated Container”, it is crucial that the cargo is pre-cooled to the specified thermostat setting at the shipper’s premises. This is especially important during the summer months, when warm cargo loaded into a refrigerated container will cause a steep rise in the return air temperature readings. A container arriving in this condition at the port of loading could delay the in gate receiving process and possibly result in the refrigerated container missing the vessel.

Elevated temperature readings due to a lack of pre-cooled cargo could also cause the terminal to waste time and money running tests to ensure the unit is running properly. Once the reefer mechanic has ruled out that the unit is malfunctioning, the shipping line should be notified and advised of the receiving temperature.

The shipping line should inform the shipper of the actual receiving temperature if excessive and request instructions as to whether or not the refrigerated container should be in gated and loaded to the vessel. If the shipper instructs the shipping line to accept and load the container to the booked vessel, this should be confirmed in writing by the shipping line. It is recommended that the bill of lading contains a clause stating the receiving temperature.

If container arrives at the port of loading after the cut-off or late receiving deadline, the shipping line must be notified and attempts made to load the container to the vessel. If the vessel planner rejects loading the container due to the late arrival, the shipper should be notified immediately for alternative plans which may include trucking the container to another port, booking the container with another carrier commonly known as a slot charter, or rolling the booking to the next vessel. Every effort should be made to avoid “rolling” refrigerated cargo.

If the refrigerated containers thermostat setting, return air temperature and vent setting flow rates are correct, the refrigerated container can be in gated. The seal



number, temperature, vent setting and cargo weight should be noted on the EIR. The refrigerated container should be stowed in the reefer section of the container yard and immediately plugged in to shore or generator power.

The container yard should monitor the refrigerated containers at least twice daily and record the thermostats setting, supply air and return air temperatures and vent setting in the refrigerated container yard monitoring log until the container is loaded onboard the vessel.

We suggest that the shipping line have contracts in place with marine terminals, third parties and railroads specifically listing services performed on refrigerated containers at the time of receipt and while in their care and custody. Services should include checking the temperature and vent setting against the temperature and vent setting received from the shipping line at time of receipt, notification of temperature and vent discrepancies and monitoring and recording the temperature and vent setting twice daily while the container is at the rail yard or marine terminal.

If the refrigerated container is experiencing mechanical problems that cannot be repaired by the terminal refrigerated container mechanic, the shipping line should be notified. The shipping line should decide if the cargo should be transloaded into another refrigerated container. If a transload is necessary, a marine surveyor should be present to record cargo temperatures and the general condition of the cargo.

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