

INFORMATION PAPER NO: 65

**Verified Gross Mass of Freight Containers and IMO Circular
MSC.1/Circ.1548 issued 27th May 2016**

DATE: 27th June 2016

All members must be aware of the impending new SOLAS amendment that requires all packed freight containers to be loaded onto a SOLAS vessel, and to have the Gross Mass of the packed container verified by either Method 1 or Method 2 (further details available on the ICHCA website at www.ichca.com/container-weighing).

Due to concerns expressed at the 96th session of the Maritime Safety Committee (11th to 20th May 2016) during the plenary debate and a discussion and presentation group outside the main meeting led by ICHCA, IMO have issued the above circular letter entitled:

**ADVICE TO ADMINISTRATIONS, PORT STATE CONTROL AUTHORITIES,
COMPANIES, PORT TERMINALS AND MASTERS REGARDING THE SOLAS
REQUIREMENTS FOR VERIFIED GROSS MASS OF PACKED CONTAINERS**

The content of the Circular Letter, reproduced below for convenience is self-explanatory, however some respondents are of the mistaken belief that this means the SOLAS amendment itself has been deferred for three months until 1st October 2016.

This is not true, all the Circular calls for is a “practical and pragmatic” approach to be taken with reference to transshipment cargoes and actual procedures for “documenting, communicating and sharing VGM information”.

It is still a requirement to obtain the VGM for the packed container either using Method 1 or Method 2 from 1st July 2016. Any terminal that loads a packed container aboard a SOLAS ship without a VGM would be in breach of International law, even if their own particular nation has not yet issued its own laws in this regard.

ICHCA International has held numerous meetings on this subject, the last one was in Antwerp on 1st June. We also attended TOC Europe in Hamburg a few weeks ago to speak on the subject. There is still some confusion out there.

We would urge all our members to ensure that they have provisions in place to deal with any contingencies they may need, to ensure that the freight container logistics supply chain does not suffer unnecessary inconvenience and delays. Terminals handling export containers for example should preferably have some capability to obtain the VGM for a container arriving without one, at the very least they should be talking to the shipping lines on what steps should be taken to ensure the smooth flow of containers continues.

ICHCA along with the World Shipping Council, TT Club and Global Shippers Forum has compiled a further set of FAQs that have been garnered since the original document was published and this will be available for download shortly from www.ichca.com/container-weighing).

If anyone has any other concerns or queries, please contact the Technical Advisor on rwab@broughmarine.co.uk.

Text of the IMO Circular:

MSC.1/Circ.1548
27 May 2016

ADVICE TO ADMINISTRATIONS, PORT STATE CONTROL AUTHORITIES,
COMPANIES, PORT TERMINALS AND MASTERS REGARDING THE SOLAS
REQUIREMENTS FOR VERIFIED GROSS MASS OF PACKED CONTAINERS

1. The Maritime Safety Committee, at its ninety-sixth session (11 to 20 May 2016), recalled that the amendments to SOLAS regulation VI/2, adopted by resolution MSC.380(94) and which will enter into force on 1 July 2016, introduce new paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 relating to the verification of the gross mass (VGM) of packed containers.
2. In this context, the Committee noted the concerns of Member States regarding practical aspects of compliance with the aforementioned SOLAS amendments, in particular, relating to transhipped containers and communication of VGM information, in an initial period following their entry into force.
3. The Committee agreed that Administrations and port State control authorities should adopt a practical and pragmatic approach when verifying compliance with the requirements of SOLAS regulations VI/2.4 to VI/2.6, for a period of three months after 1 July 2016, with a view to:

3.1. permitting packed containers that are loaded on a ship before 1 July 2016 and are transhipped on or after 1 July 2016 to be shipped to their final port of discharge without the VGM specified in SOLAS regulations VI/2.4 to VI/2.6; and

3.2. providing flexibility to all the stakeholders in containerized transport to refine, if necessary, procedures for documenting, communicating and sharing VGM information.

4. Notwithstanding the above, the Committee emphasized that the stability and safe operation of ships, including the safe packing, handling and transport of containers, is not limited to the provision and use of VGM information and is also covered by a number of SOLAS regulations, including SOLAS regulations VI/2.1, VI/2.2 and VI/2.3, and other IMO instruments, amongst others.

5. Member States are invited to be guided accordingly and to bring the contents of this circular to the attention of all concerned, especially port State control officers.

6. This circular will remain effective until 1 October 2016.