

Unpacking shipping containers

This information sheet and table provide ways to safely unpack shipping containers and minimise the risk of injuries.

June 2010

Unpacking shipping containers involves significant hazards to workers.

The following information is for employers, workers, importers, labour hire companies and container freight station operators. It will assist to develop safe work practices and outlines practical ways for the safe unpacking of containers to ensure the health and safety of workers.

Main hazards

The main hazards associated with unpacking shipping containers include:

- hazardous placement of container at site
- falls from height
- falling goods
- fumigation
- manual handling
- slips, trips and falls
- pedestrian and mobile plant separation
- palletising of goods for storage or onward transportation
- environment
- removal of shipping containers.

Employers must provide a safe work environment to workers by implementing adequate controls to all identified hazards.

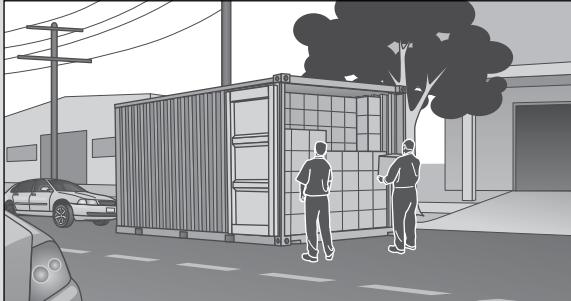
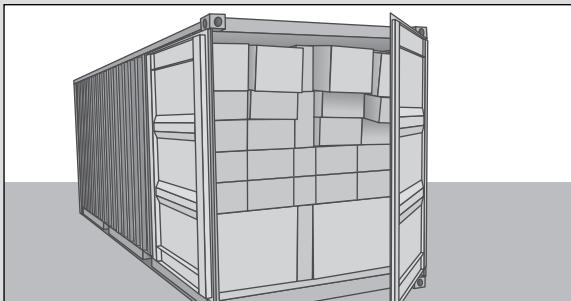
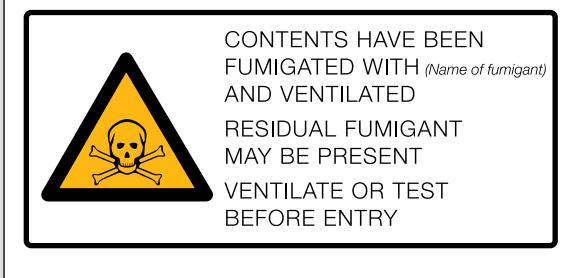
How to use the table

The table lists and shows an example of the main hazards. It also includes the possible consequence (eg being hit by a forklift) of the hazard and provides a list of recommended controls. The controls listed are for unpacking shipping containers on an infrequent basis. If unpacking is done frequently, additional/varying controls may apply – some of these are highlighted in the table. ‘Frequent’ is considered to be more than one container per day.

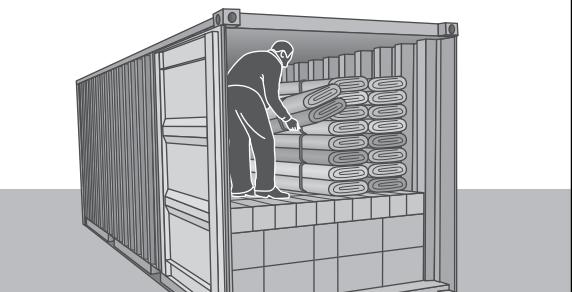
Hierarchy of controls

There are various ways of controlling risks – these can be ranked from the highest level of protection to the lowest. This ranking is called the ‘hierarchy of control’. The most effective method of control is eliminating the hazard. If the hazard cannot be eliminated, the risk should be controlled as far as reasonably practicable. Using personal protective equipment (PPE) is the lowest form of control and should be used in conjunction with other controls.

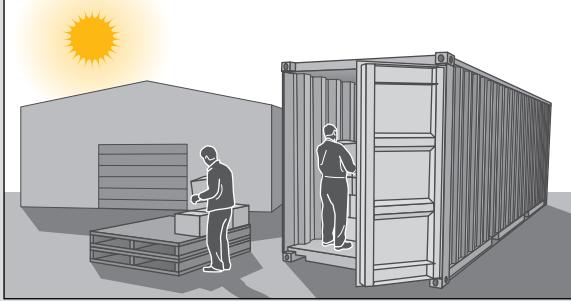
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Hazard	Possible consequence	Recommended controls
Hazardous placement of container at site  Example	Cars, trucks and other road vehicles colliding with containers. Electrocution due to placing container under overhead powerlines.	Place the container inside the premises. If this is not practicable, place the container away from vehicle traffic, with pedestrian exclusion zones and cones to control traffic. Place container away from overhead powerlines. If this is not practicable, unpack container at a third party premises (eg freight station) and transport goods in smaller vehicles.
Falls from height  Example	Slips, trips and falls when container is mounted on the trailer.	Unpack the container from ground level. Use a finger dock or specifically designed mobile platform (eg truck loading platform) to unpack.
Falling goods  Example	Goods shifting and pushing against container doors may lead to uncontrolled opening of the doors.	Secure container doors with a short rope (enough to see if the goods have shifted when the doors are partially opened) and: <ul style="list-style-type: none">if goods have not shifted, remove rope and open doorsif goods have shifted, consult with workers to develop and implement a safe method of unpacking using a safe work method statement.
Fumigation  Example	Exposure to remaining fumigants present in containers.	Review container documentation to see if fumigated. See <i>Fumigated shipping containers – Venting prior to unpacking (end user)</i> for more information.

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Hazard	Possible consequence	Recommended controls
Manual handling  Example	<p>Manually unpacking goods can cause injury due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• awkward posture• repetitive action• operation above shoulder height and below knee level• duration of task• weight and size of goods• configuration of storage (eg tightly packed).	<p>Use powered mobile plant (eg forklift) to unpack the container.</p> <p>If not practicable, consult with workers to develop and implement a safe method of unpacking. Consider the weight/size and layout of goods and configuration of the storage within the container:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For large, bulky or awkward goods, use a mechanical aid (eg forklift).• For lightweight goods:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– use platform ladders to access goods at height– use pallet jacks, trolleys or adjustable conveyor to ensure goods are handled between knee and shoulder height– ensure people are trained to unpack manually– rotate jobs to reduce risk to workers.
Slips, trips and falls  Example	<p>Poor housekeeping around the container and palletising area increases the risk of slips, trips and falls.</p>	<p>Keep area around the container and pallets clear of obstructions.</p> <p>Ensure floor surfaces are even and undamaged.</p> <p>If not practicable, unpack at a third party location (eg freight station) and transport goods in smaller vehicles.</p>
Pedestrian and mobile plant separation  Example	<p>People being hit by mobile plant such as forklifts.</p>	<p>Implement pedestrian exclusion zone to separate pedestrians and mobile plant by a minimum of three metres outside the forklift operational area.</p> <p>For frequent unpackers</p> <p>Ensure physical barriers are in place to separate pedestrians and powered mobile plant. This may include bollards, concrete barricades or steel pillars.</p> <p>Put speed limiters on forklifts. Ensure location sensors are worn by workers.</p>

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Hazard	Possible consequence	Recommended controls
Palletising of goods for storage/onward transport  Example	Manually placing goods on pallets may cause musculoskeletal injuries.	Ensure workers palletise and hand wrap between knee and shoulder height. Ensure workers wrap and secure palletised loads (eg webbing) before moving.
Environment  Example	Insufficient lighting and adverse environmental conditions (eg heat, rain and ventilation) can cause injuries, such as physical fatigue.	Ensure adequate lighting in the container. Note: this should not introduce additional hazards (eg electrical cable on the ground). Implement job rotation, PPE and additional facilities (eg drinking water) for adverse environmental conditions.
Removal of shipping containers  Example	Risk of serious injury if hit by mobile plant, such as forklifts, side-loaders or cranes.	Implement a driver and pedestrian exclusion zone in place when loading the container onto a trailer.

Further information

Contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service on 1800 136 089 or go to worksafe.vic.gov.au