

SMDG Recommendation #2: Container with non-ISO identification

According to ISO 6346, a container identification code consists of a 4-letter prefix and a 7-digit number (composed of a 3-letter owner code, a category identifier, a serial number and a check-digit).

However, some containers that show up in maritime transport (mostly Shipper's owned equipment) are not officially registered and do not comply with that standard. Although they have a valid container safety certificate, they show an unregistered identification code containing less than 4 letters or less than 7 digits. As many existing IT systems in the maritime industry (including those of some authorities) require an alphabetical prefix, they are often transmitted in a modified way in EDI messages. Mismatches caused by the use of different dummy prefixes or other modifications can easily lead to confusion and generate additional efforts and delays during operation.

In order to support a unified approach, SMDG has approved the following recommendation:

In EDI messages, container identification should be transmitted exactly as it is marked on the box.

In case it consists of numerals only and for any reason a dummy prefix cannot be avoided, we strongly recommend to use 'NONE' in order to indicate the absence of a prefix on the container itself.

Note: If 'NONE' is received as part of container identification, check sum calculation shall not be expected to match.

In particular, the following rules shall apply when transmitting equipment identification:

- No whitespace character shall be transmitted as part of the identification.
- No special characters (e.g. '-', '/', '?') shall be transmitted as part of the identification.
- Not more than 4 letters shall be transmitted.
- At least one digit shall be transmitted as part of the equipment identification.
- If identification starts with less than four letters, no additional letters shall be added for transmission.
- If identification number consists of less than seven digits, no leading zero nor any other digit shall be added 'to fill up' during transmissions.
- If identification does not include any preceding letter and a dummy prefix cannot be avoided, no prefix other than 'NONE' shall be transmitted.
- 'NONE' shall be used only to indicate 'no prefix present on container' in EDI transmissions, we strongly recommend not to use it as marking on any container.

Examples:

Marking on the box	EDI Transmission	Remark
ABCD 12345	ABCD12345	
AB 0123	AB0123	
1234567	1234567	recommended
123	123	recommended
1234567	NONE1234567	acceptable
123	NONE123	acceptable
ABCDEF 123		impractical (too many letters)
ABCD 123456789		impractical (serial number too long)
ABCD		impractical (missing serial number)

Note: Identification numbers consisting of more than 4 letters or more than 7 digits or without any digit are considered prohibitively impractical for international maritime transport.