

U.S. International Ocean Transportation—Operational and Tariff Use

Purpose. This reference standardizes container names, abbreviations, and common synonyms used in tariffs, rate quotations, service contracts, NRAs, NSAs, bills of lading, booking confirmations, invoices, detention and demurrage communications, and terminal instructions. The Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) regulates ocean transportation practices and tariff transparency, but it does not prescribe one universal commercial abbreviation for every container design. Carrier-specific equipment codes and dimensional specifications must therefore be verified before booking.

1. FMC Regulatory Context

- **Tariff clarity:** Under 46 CFR Part 520, carrier tariffs must clearly state applicable rates, charges, classifications, rules, and practices. Equipment size or type should be defined whenever it affects the rate, surcharge, free time, or service condition.
- **OTI status:** NVOCC and ocean freight forwarder requirements are governed principally by 46 CFR Part 515; definitions should distinguish the regulated party from the equipment it books or arranges.
- **Terminal practices:** Marine terminal operator schedules and practices are addressed in 46 CFR Part 525.
- **Detention and demurrage:** Billing practices are governed by 46 CFR Part 541. Documents should distinguish container detention from terminal demurrage and identify the equipment involved.
- **Operational verification:** Nominal container names do not guarantee exact internal dimensions, door openings, payload, tare weight, refrigeration range, or loading method. Confirm the VOCC's current equipment specification before acceptance.

2. Standard Container Types, Abbreviations, and Synonyms

Container and equipment terminology			
Container Type	Common Abbreviation(s)	Synonyms / Alternate Terms	Typical Use and Compliance Note
20-foot dry	20GP, 20DC, 20DV	20 standard, 20 dry van, 20 general purpose	General cargo; state whether rate is per container or per TEU.
40-foot dry	40GP, 40DC, 40DV	40 standard, 40 dry van, 40 general purpose	General cargo; commonly treated as one FEU or two TEU for capacity reporting.
40-foot high cube	40HC, 40HQ	High cube, hi-cube	Taller dry container; identify separately where rates, surcharges, or availability differ.
45-foot high cube	45HC, 45HQ	45 hi-cube	Specialized high-capacity equipment; verify carrier and lane acceptance.
Refrigerated container	RF, RE, RH, 20RF, 40RF, 40RH	Reefer, refrigerated container, temperature-controlled container	Perishable or temperature-sensitive cargo; document set point, ventilation, humidity, pre-trip inspection, and power responsibilities where applicable.
Non-operating reefer	NOR	Reefer-as-dry, non-active reefer	Reefer used without active refrigeration; disclose equipment restrictions and reduced interior dimensions.
Open-top container	OT, 20OT, 40OT	Open top, soft-top	Top-loading or over-height cargo; define over-dimensional charges and securing responsibilities.

Hard-top container	HT	Hard-top open top, removable-roof container	Removable rigid roof; verify lift method and roof-handling requirements.
Flat rack	FR, 20FR, 40FR	Flat-rack container, collapsible flat rack	Heavy or over-dimensional cargo; specify out-of-gauge dimensions, lashing, and weight distribution.
Platform	PL, PF	Bolster, platform container	Flat deck without end walls; used for heavy or oversized cargo.
Tank container	TK, TNK, ISO Tank	Tank box, intermodal tank	Bulk liquids or gases; identify commodity compatibility, dangerous-goods requirements, and cleaning condition.
Ventilated container	VH, VC	Vented container, coffee container	Cargo requiring airflow; distinguish passive ventilation from powered refrigeration.
Insulated container	IN, INS	Thermal container, insulated box	Maintains temperature without integral refrigeration; specify cooling method if any.
Bulk container	BU, BK	Dry-bulk container, bulk box	Dry flowable commodities; note that containerized bulk tendered under mark and count is not treated as loose unpackaged bulk cargo for Part 520 purposes.
Garment-on-hanger container	GOH	Garmentainer, hanging-garment container	Fitted for hanging apparel; disclose fitting, loading, and return-condition requirements.
Swap body	SWB	Exchange body, demountable body	Primarily European intermodal equipment; do not confuse SWB with "sea waybill."
Container on chassis	COC*	Mounted container, wheeled container	Use caution: COC more commonly means carrier-owned container. Spell out the intended meaning.

3. Capacity, Ownership, and Condition Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term	Meaning / Caution
TEU	Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit	Capacity/reporting unit based on a nominal 20-foot container; not itself an equipment booking code.
FEU	Forty-Foot Equivalent Unit	Common commercial capacity reference for a nominal 40-foot container.
COC	Carrier-Owned Container	Container supplied or controlled by the ocean carrier; confirm which party bears equipment charges.
SOC	Shipper-Owned Container	Container supplied by the shipper/cargo interest; carrier acceptance, certification, condition, and stowage requirements apply.
Laden	Loaded Container	Container containing cargo; also called full or loaded.
MTY / MT	Empty	Empty equipment; "MT" may be confused with metric ton, so spell out when ambiguity exists.

FCL	Full Container Load	Commercial service term; does not necessarily mean the container is physically filled to capacity.
LCL	Less-than-Container Load	Cargo consolidated with other shipments, commonly handled through a CFS.
OOG	Out of Gauge	Cargo exceeds standard container dimensions; record over-height, over-width, and/or over-length separately.
OW	Overweight	Weight exceeds a stated operational or legal threshold; define the threshold and responsible party.
DG / HAZ	Dangerous Goods / Hazardous Materials	Requires accurate classification, declaration, packing, placarding, and carrier acceptance under applicable law and code.

4. Container Locations, Moves, and Service Terms

Term	Full Term / Synonym	Operational Meaning
CY	Container Yard	Terminal or depot area where full containers are received, stored, staged, and released.
CFS	Container Freight Station	Facility for LCL consolidation, deconsolidation, and cargo handling.
ICD	Inland Container Depot	Inland facility for container storage, customs activity, release, or intermodal transfer.
Ramp	Intermodal Rail Ramp	Facility where containers transfer between rail and truck.
Depot	Equipment Depot	Facility for empty pickup/return, inspection, storage, maintenance, or repair.
Door	Shipper/Consignee Facility	Pickup or delivery at a warehouse, factory, distribution center, or other named facility.
CY/CY	Container Yard to Container Yard	Carrier service scope from origin CY to destination CY.
Door/CY	Door to Container Yard	Origin inland pickup with delivery to destination CY.
CY/Door	Container Yard to Door	Origin CY receipt with inland delivery to destination facility.
Door/Door	Door to Door	Inland pickup through inland delivery, subject to the bill of lading and rate terms.
Live Load / Unload	Driver Wait	Container remains on chassis while cargo is loaded or unloaded.
Drop and Pick	Drop / Hook	Equipment is left for loading/unloading and later retrieved or exchanged.
Street Turn	Triangulation	Reuse of an import empty for an export move without returning it first to the designated depot, subject to authorization.

5. Equipment Charge and Time Terms

- **Demurrage:** Charge associated with use of terminal space or failure to remove cargo/equipment from the terminal within allowed free time.
- **Detention:** Charge associated with use of carrier equipment outside the terminal beyond allowed free time.
- **Per diem:** Daily equipment-use charge; often used as a detention synonym, but the governing tariff or contract should control.
- **Free time:** Period allowed before demurrage or detention begins; define start event, end event, calendar/business-day treatment, and exceptions.
- **Storage:** Charge for terminal, rail, depot, warehouse, or other facility space; not automatically synonymous with demurrage.
- **Chassis usage / rental:** Charge for use of a chassis; identify provider, free period, daily rate, and stop event.
- **Pre-pull:** Movement of a container from a terminal before final delivery, usually to avoid congestion or free-time expiration.
- **Dry run:** Unsuccessful truck trip caused by cargo, documentation, appointment, equipment, terminal, or facility conditions; invoices should identify the cause.

6. Minimum Information to State in Tariffs, Quotes, and Shipping Documents

1. Nominal container length and type, such as 20GP, 40HC, or 40RF.
2. Whether equipment is COC or SOC and who supplies the chassis, genset, or other accessory.
3. Rate basis, such as per container, TEU, FEU, shipment, day, move, or weight unit.
4. Commodity and any restrictions involving weight, dimensions, dangerous goods, temperature, ventilation, or loading method.
5. Service scope and named origin/destination points: CY, CFS, ramp, port, depot, or door.
6. All equipment-related charges, triggering events, free time, calculation method, and responsible billed party.
7. For reefer service: temperature unit and set point, ventilation, humidity, monitoring, pre-trip inspection, genset/power, and malfunction-notification terms.
8. For OOG cargo: exact cargo and packed dimensions, overage on each side, gross weight, center of gravity when material, and securing/lashing responsibilities.
9. Carrier-specific code cross-reference when the code differs from the commonly used abbreviation.
10. A statement that final equipment acceptance and specifications are subject to the underlying VOCC's current rules and equipment availability.

7. Recommended Standardization Rule

On first use, state the full equipment name followed by the approved abbreviation in parentheses—for example, “40-foot high-cube dry container (40HC).” Use the same abbreviation throughout the tariff, quote, bill of lading, invoice, and operating instructions. Avoid undefined codes, and do not assume that similar terms—such as demurrage, detention, per diem, or storage—are interchangeable.