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Customs Clearance Documents from China - Pre-Seal File Checklist

A printable field pack for building one clean shipment file from China: the six core records, a 14-line pre-seal checklist, the five-field match check, destination deadlines and bonds, and the errors that hold a container.

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DISCLAIMER

This checklist is a field tool drawn from LeelineGroup's export and import shipment files. It is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for licensed customs brokerage, legal counsel or carrier advice. Customs rules and deadlines change, so confirm current requirements with a licensed broker before every shipment. LeelineGroup does not act as your importer of record or customs broker unless separately engaged in writing.

1. The Six Core Records, Plus Conditional Add-ons

Every shipment file starts with six core records. A short list of conditional documents is added only when the shipment calls for them. Group the file this way and the invoice, the packing list and the entry filing stop contradicting each other.

Record	Who files	When	Side	Must match
Commercial invoice	Exporter	Before booking	Both	Packing list and PO
Packing list	Exporter	Before booking	Both	Invoice line items
Sales contract / PO	Buyer and exporter	With the order	Both	Invoice and Incoterm
Bill of lading / air waybill	Carrier	After loading	Both	Invoice and ISF
China export declaration	Exporter or its broker	After customs area, before port cut-off	China export	Invoice and packing list
Customs power of attorney	Importer (import side)	Before first entry	Import	Invoice legal name

Conditional documents - add only when they apply

• ISF 10+2 - US ocean cargo only. File the core data 24 hours before loading at the foreign port.

• Certificate of origin - only when you claim a trade preference under an agreement China has signed (RCEP, ASEAN). The US has no FTA with China.

• Product test reports or compliance certificates - regulated goods (CE/RoHS for the EU, FCC for the US).

• Insurance certificate - CIF/CIP terms or a letter of credit. It is not a customs document.

• ISPM 15 marking - solid-wood packaging needs the IPPC stamp (HT or MB) on the wood, not a separate certificate in most markets.

2. The 14-Line Pre-Seal Checklist

Confirm all 14 fields against their source documents before every seal-up, then sign the sheet. A field that cannot be matched to its source is a stop, not a note.

	Field to confirm	Source document	Who checks	Done
	Consignee legal name	Invoice + B/L + ISF	Export docs	
	Buyer / importer of record name	Invoice + ISF + POA	Broker	
	Product description (one master line)	Invoice + packing list + export declaration	Merchandiser	
	HS / HTS code (broker-reviewed)	Invoice + export declaration	Customs broker	
	Quantity per line	Invoice + packing list + export declaration	Merchandiser	
	Unit price, total value, currency	Invoice + PO	Finance	
	Country of origin	Invoice + CO (if claimed)	Compliance	
	Incoterm + named place	Invoice + PO + booking note	Sales ops	
	Carton count	Packing list + physical count	Warehouse / QC	
	Gross and net weight	Packing list + B/L	Logistics	
	Package marks and dimensions	Packing list + B/L	Logistics	
	Route + release method (original / telex / sea waybill)	B/L + ISF	Forwarder liaison	
	Filer names on both sides	PO / booking + POA	Operations lead	
	ISF / ENS transmit receipt + signed POA	Destination pack	Broker	

3. The Five-Field Match Check (72h Before Filing)

Run this against the master line list, the invoice and the export declaration 72 hours before filing. One mismatch triggers a manual review, so fix it at the source before the declaration is lodged.

Field	What good looks like	Actual on file	Match (Y/N)
Product description	Copied word for word from the master line list		
HS code	Broker-reviewed; matches the export declaration and invoice		
Quantity	Matches the packing-list count, line by line		
Value	Matches the invoice total and the PO		
Exporter details	Legal name on the declaration equals the contracting entity		

4. Destination Deadlines and Bonds

Each destination sets its own filing clock. The China export declaration follows the port cut-off; the 24-hour rule belongs to the vessel manifest and to the US ISF, not to that declaration. Confirm current deadlines with a licensed broker before every shipment.

Route	Deadline	Basis
US entry	Within 15 calendar days of arrival	19 CFR Part 142
US entry summary (CBP 7501)	Within 10 working days of release	19 CFR Part 142, with estimated duty
US customs bond	Before first entry	Single-entry bond for one shipment; continuous bond for frequent importers
US ISF (ocean)	Core data 24h before loading	19 CFR Part 149; 2 flexible items up to 24h before US arrival
Internal ISF buffer	Transmit 72h before loading	LeelineGroup rule, not a CBP requirement
China export declaration	After customs area, before port cut-off	GACC; not a fixed 24-hour rule
UK entry	Before arrival	GB EORI required to file the entry
EU entry / ENS	Before arrival	EU EORI required; carrier files ENS, you own data accuracy

5. Common Document Mistakes

These are the errors that most often hold a container. Each one is preventable with one master line list and a final count before seal-up.

- [ ] 1. Inconsistent product descriptions
  Evidence: One master line list, copied word for word into the invoice and packing list.
- [ ] 2. Carton-count mismatch
  Evidence: Physical recount at the loading door against the master list.
- [ ] 3. Weight or value discrepancies
  Evidence: Final cross-document reconciliation on one signed, dated sheet.
- [ ] 4. Outdated HS code after a tariff revision
  Evidence: Broker-reviewed code, rechecked before the export filing.
- [ ] 5. Wrong consignee or importer details
  Evidence: Written importer-of-record details, spelling confirmed letter for letter.
- [ ] 6. Late ISF or ENS data
  Evidence: Transmit 72 hours before loading; keep the filing receipt in the destination pack.

6. Sources & Official References

Check every deadline and field against the issuing authority, never against a forwarded PDF or a checklist alone.

• US CBP - commercial invoice contents (19 CFR 141.86)

The fields a US-bound commercial invoice must show: buyer, seller, detailed description, quantity, unit price, currency, origin and itemized charges. (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-19/chapter-I/part-141/subpart-F/section-141.86)

• US CBP - entry and entry summary (19 CFR Part 142)

Entry within 15 days of arrival; entry summary within 10 working days of release, filed with estimated duty. (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-19/chapter-I/part-142)

• US CBP - Importer Security Filing (ISF 10+2, 19 CFR Part 149)

The ISF data elements and the 24-hour pre-loading deadline; liquidated damages up to $5,000 per violation. (https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/ports-entry/cargo-security/importer-security-filing-102)

• USITC - Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTSUS)

Look up the HTS code and check Chapter 99 for Section 301 additional duties. (https://hts.usitc.gov/)

• IPPC - ISPM 15 wood packaging standard

Solid-wood packaging must carry the IPPC stamp (HT or MB). Unmarked wood packaging can be refused or re-exported. (https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/640/)

• HMRC / GOV.UK - EORI number

The UK EORI number required to move goods into or out of Great Britain. (https://www.gov.uk/eori)

• European Commission - EU EORI number

The EU Economic Operators Registration and Identification number used for EU customs declarations. (https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/customs-4/customs-procedures-import-and-export-0/registration-and-identification-customs/economic-operators-registration-and-identification-number-eori_en)

• ICC - Incoterms 2020 rules

The trade terms that set who books, pays and insures; write the term and the named place on every document. (https://iccwbo.org/resources-for-business/incoterms-rules/)

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Want Someone On The Ground Running These Checks?

Run this checklist yourself, or have it run for you: registry entity checks, bank-beneficiary matching, a live factory walkthrough and an AQL pre-shipment inspection on your own PO. We charge a transparent 5%-10% service fee and take no factory kickbacks. Free quote, no obligation.

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