

Cargo damage or loss: which documents to prepare

The cargo arrived damaged or did not arrive at all? Your chances of compensation depend on how the documents are drawn up – from the transport order to the claim. A step-by-step guide.

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format for route

1 It all starts with the transport order

A transport order is the contract between the customer and the carrier for a specific trip. It sets out the terms you will rely on in a dispute. What it should contain:

- ☐ **Parties and contacts**
Details of the customer and carrier, contact persons at loading and unloading.
- ☐ **Route and deadlines**
Addresses and dates of loading and unloading, delivery time.
- ☐ **Description of the cargo**
Description, number of packages, weight, volume, packaging, value.
- ☐ **Vehicle and driver**
Vehicle type, tractor and trailer registration numbers, driver's name.
- ☐ **Rate and payment terms**
Amount, currency, payment deadlines, payment for excess waiting time.
- ☐ **Liability and insurance**
Who is liable for the cargo and to what extent, whether it is insured.

2 Acceptance of the cargo by the consignee

Under the CMR (Article 30), the deadline for notifying damage depends on whether it is apparent:

Immediately

Apparent damage and shortage – reservations are made on delivery, in box 24 of the CMR and in the report.

7 days

Hidden damage – written reservations no later than 7 days after delivery (Sundays and public holidays excepted).

21 days

Delay in delivery – a written claim within 21 days from the time the goods were placed at the consignee's disposal.

1 year

General limitation period under the CMR (3 years in case of the carrier's wilful misconduct).

! If no reservations are made on delivery, the goods are presumed to have been received in the condition described in the CMR. The consignee will have to prove otherwise.

3 What to do if the cargo is damaged

- 1 Do not refuse the cargo straight away**
Accept it with reservations – refusing without grounds complicates the dispute.
- 2 Make a reservation in the CMR**
In box 24: what is damaged, how many packages, the nature of the damage. Ideally with the driver's signature next to it.
- 3 Draw up a damage report**
In the driver's presence: list of packages, nature of the damage, condition of the packaging, seals and trailer. Signatures of all parties; if the driver refuses, note it in the report.
- 4 Take photos and videos**
The vehicle and seals, the packaging, every damaged package, the markings.
- 5 Call a surveyor for major damage**
An independent survey is strong evidence of the amount of loss.
- 6 Send a claim**
In writing, within the CMR deadlines, with supporting documents attached.

4 Claim outline

SECTION	WHAT TO INCLUDE
Header	To whom (carrier/forwarder), from whom, date, reference number.

SECTION	WHAT TO INCLUDE
Circumstances	Transport order and CMR numbers, route, date of delivery, what happened to the cargo.
Demand	Amount of compensation and how it is calculated: value of the damaged or lost cargo, carriage charges, survey costs.
Grounds	Terms of the transport order, CMR articles (Art. 17, 23, 30).
Response deadline	A reasonable time for review and bank details for payment.
Attachments	Copies of the CMR with reservations, the report, photos, invoice, packing list, transport order, surveyor's report.

i Under the CMR, a written claim suspends the limitation period until the day the carrier rejects the claim in writing and returns the attached documents.

5 How to reduce the risks in advance

- Insure valuable cargo or declare its value in the CMR — the carrier's liability is limited to 8.33 SDR per kg of gross weight.
- Photograph the cargo and the seals at loading.
- Check the packaging and make reservations in box 18 of the CMR if it is unreliable.
- Keep all trip documents at least until the limitation period expires.

Questions about documents?

AsDi Cargo managers will tell you what to prepare for your cargo. Message us on WhatsApp or call.

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This guide is for reference only and is not legal advice. Laws and international agreements change — check the current regulations before each trip and confirm the details with a customs representative or your manager. Version: October 2026.