

STRONG, PRACTICAL STRUCTURES

Shipping Container Facts



01

Built for goods

Shipping containers are strong, practical structures designed to carry goods over long distances. For self storage, drive-up access makes it easy to load and retrieve items. Sound doors and seals help protect stored goods from rain and dust.



02

Strength with limits

Steel corner posts, rails and corrugated panels create a robust structure. Good condition, sound foundations and appropriate securing are essential. Inspect the structure and match the container to its intended use and site conditions.



03

A turning point in 1956

Malcom McLean helped transform modern container shipping. On 26 April 1956, the Ideal X left Newark carrying 58 containerised truck bodies for Houston. Earlier forms of containers existed; this voyage helped establish modern intermodal shipping.

HOW THE NETWORK WORKS

Shipping Container Facts



04

Replacing break-bulk cargo

Before containerisation, much general cargo was handled piece by piece as break-bulk cargo. Standard containers reduced repeated handling when goods moved between trucks, trains and ships, helping cut time and handling costs.



05

A worldwide container network

Containers circulate through a worldwide network of ports, ships, railways and roads. Fleet size and transport movements are different measures. A container can make many journeys, so a trip count is not the number of boxes in existence.



06

Millions of boxes in circulation

The global fleet includes containers at sea, on land, in depots and with customers. BIC's BoxTech database alone holds technical data for over 15 million containers; it is a registry, not a complete count of the world fleet.

CONTAINERS ON THE MOVE

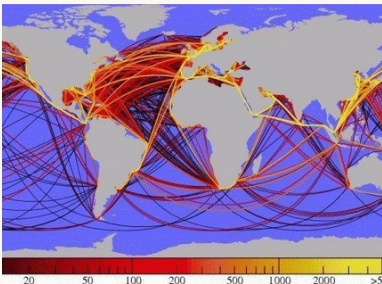
Shipping Container Facts



07

Not every box is moving

Some containers are in transit, while others are being loaded, unloaded, repaired or waiting for their next trip. Fleet utilisation changes with trading patterns, demand, maintenance needs and the availability of transport links.



08

Over 280 million transported

The World Shipping Council reports that over 280 million containers were transported in 2025. These are transport movements, not unique physical containers. Major trade routes link Asia, Europe, the Americas and many other regions.



09

A global scale

Shipping containers connect businesses and households across continents. Standard 20ft and 40ft dimensions make it possible to transfer the same box between transport modes, supporting a vast network of everyday trade.

MANUFACTURING AND MARINE RISKS

Shipping Container Facts



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Container manufacturing

China is a major centre of shipping-container manufacturing, supported by established steelworking, production and export networks. Large production centres supply the global fleet with standard dry containers, refrigerated containers and specialist equipment.



11

Containers can be lost at sea

The World Shipping Council estimates 1,478 containers were lost at sea in 2025 out of over 280 million transported. Losses vary each year. Extreme weather and fire remain leading causes; every loss can carry safety and environmental consequences.



12

Lost containers are hazardous

A container overboard may float for a time or sink, depending on its condition and contents. Floating or partly submerged containers can be difficult to see and pose a risk to small vessels, as well as causing pollution.

NEW USES AND BIGGER SHIPS

Shipping Container Facts



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Retirement and reuse

Containers eventually leave transport service. Some are resold for storage or other uses; some are repaired, recycled or scrapped. Reuse can extend a container's useful life, provided its condition and suitability are checked.



14

Beyond shipping

Containers can be adapted into offices, sheds, shops and homes. Modifications for occupied buildings need appropriate design, engineering and approvals. Cutting walls or adding openings can change the container's structural performance.



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Larger container ships

Shipping lines continue to invest in larger vessels and more efficient operations. Modern ultra-large container ships can carry around 24,000 TEU or more. TEU means twenty-foot equivalent unit: a 40ft container counts as two TEU.

TRADE ON A GLOBAL SCALE

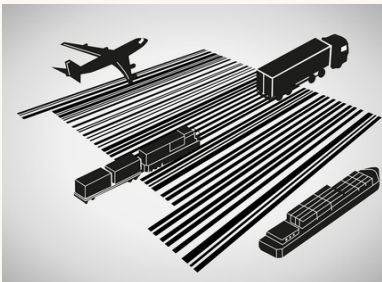
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Capacity has grown

Container ships have grown dramatically since the early years of containerisation. Today's ultra-large vessels can carry many times the capacity of early purpose-built ships. Quoted capacity is usually in TEU, not a count of individual boxes.



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Over 80% travels by sea

UN Trade and Development reports that over 80% of international merchandise trade by volume moves by sea. This includes both containerised goods and bulk cargo. Road and rail connect ports to suppliers and customers inland.



18

Shanghai's huge throughput

Shanghai handled 55.06 million TEU in 2025, according to Shanghai International Port Group. Port throughput counts handling activity in twenty-foot equivalents, not unique containers. It illustrates the extraordinary scale of modern port operations.

STORAGE SPACE AND STRUCTURE

Shipping Container Facts



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What fits in a 20ft container?

Our standard 20ft container offers 33.1 cubic metres of internal space. The number of shoe boxes or other items it holds depends on their dimensions, packaging, stacking and the access space you leave. Measure first rather than relying on a fixed count.



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A long useful life

A well-maintained container can have a useful life extending beyond its original shipping service. Lifespan depends on corrosion, damage, repairs and exposure. Regular inspections of the roof, doors, seals and structure help keep it suitable for storage.



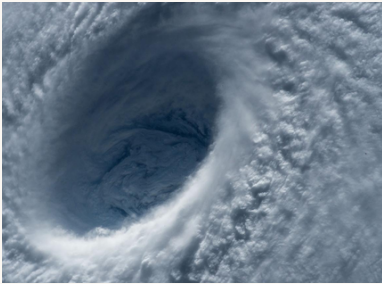
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How the structure works

Corner posts and fittings carry stacking loads, while rails, walls, ends and doors contribute to structural integrity. For transport use, the container's safety approval plate and inspection status matter. Alterations or damage can reduce strength.

WEATHER, STACKING AND YOUR STORAGE

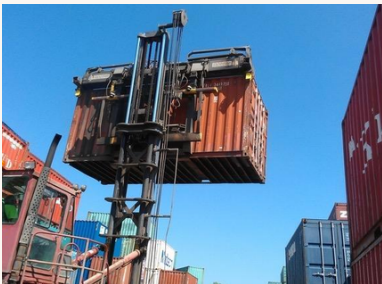
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Weather resistance needs context

Steel construction gives containers useful weather resistance, but there is no universal safe wind-speed rating for an unsecured container. Wind performance depends on condition, anchoring, foundations, exposure and site design. Do not assume cyclone-proof protection.



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Stacking needs engineering

Containers are designed to be stacked under specified conditions. Safe height depends on the container's rating, loads, condition, foundations and securing system. Check the safety approval plate and obtain professional advice; the rated load and site design determine what is safe.

Ready to store with us?

We hope you have enjoyed learning more about the humble shipping container. Choose a drive-up 10ft, 20ft or 40ft container in Albion. Access is 5am to 9pm, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Statistics checked October 2026. Sources: World Shipping Council; UN Trade and Development; Shanghai International Port Group; BIC BoxTech; MSC; Smithsonian; IMO. Full links are in the accompanying download list.