

CUSTOMS DOCUMENTATION CHECKLIST

A practical guide to the paperwork required for smooth cross-border and international freight movements.



1. Why This Checklist Matters

Delays at borders and ports are, in almost every case, a documentation problem rather than a transport problem. Incomplete, incorrect, or missing paperwork is the single biggest cause of cargo being held, fined, or returned. This checklist sets out the documents SMA Logistics requires from clients before a shipment moves, and the documents our team will prepare and manage on your behalf.

This document is a general guide. Requirements vary by commodity, destination, and current customs regulations, and SMA Logistics will always confirm the exact document set for your specific shipment before departure.

2. Core Documents Required for Every Shipment

- ☐ Commercial Invoice — reflecting accurate value, Incoterms, currency, and full buyer/seller details.
- ☐ Packing List — itemised weights, dimensions, and package/pallet count matching the invoice.
- ☐ Bill of Lading / Road Consignment Note (CMR) / Waybill — as applicable to the mode of transport.
- ☐ Proof of Origin / Certificate of Origin — required for preferential tariff treatment (e.g. SADC, AfCFTA).
- ☐ Import/Export Permit — where the commodity is regulated (e.g. agricultural goods, chemicals, minerals).
- ☐ SARS Customs Declaration (SAD 500) — completed by a registered clearing agent.
- ☐ Letter of Authority — appointing SMA Logistics (or our clearing partner) to act on the client's behalf.

3. Additional Documents by Shipment Type

3.1 Cross-Border Road Freight (SADC Region)

- Cross-Border Road Transport Permit
- SADC Certificate of Origin (Form SC)
- Transit Bond / Guarantee document, where transiting a third country
- Vehicle registration and driver documentation for each border post

3.2 Sea & Air Freight

- Bill of Lading (sea) or Air Waybill (air)
- Marine/Cargo Insurance Certificate
- Container/Seal numbers and packing declaration

3.3 Regulated or Restricted Commodities

- Relevant regulatory permit (e.g. ITAC, Department of Agriculture, SAHPRA)
- Phytosanitary Certificate (agricultural products)
- Fumigation Certificate, where required by destination country

4. Document Accuracy — Common Rejection Reasons

Issue	Typical Consequence
Invoice value does not match packing list	Customs hold for valuation query
Missing or incorrect HS (tariff) code	Delay, incorrect duty assessment, or penalty
Consignee details incomplete or mismatched	Cargo cannot be released to receiver
Certificate of Origin not signed/stamped	Loss of preferential duty rate
Permit expired or commodity not covered	Cargo detained pending correct permit

5. Client Responsibilities

To keep your shipment moving without delay, please ensure that:

- All documents are submitted at least 48 hours before scheduled departure (longer for regulated goods).
- Invoice values, quantities, and descriptions are accurate and consistent across all documents.
- Any special permits or licences are valid for the full duration of transit, not just the departure date.
- SMA Logistics is notified immediately of any change to consignee, route, or commodity details.

6. What SMA Logistics Handles For You

- Preparation and lodging of customs declarations through our registered clearing partners.
- Verification of documentation completeness before cargo is dispatched.
- Coordination with border and port authorities on your behalf.
- Real-time updates on clearance status and any queries raised by customs.

7. Need Help?

Our operations team is available to guide you through documentation requirements for your specific commodity and route. Contact SMA Logistics before booking to confirm the exact document set for your shipment.

Document prepared for SMA Logistics client resources. Regulations are subject to change — please confirm current requirements with our operations team prior to shipment.