

How to Safeguard Your Balikbayan Box Shipment

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said Quizon, who is DTI-PSB's Shipping Operations Specialist II and recently Acting Consumer Adjudication Officer.

He cited an instance wherein two water heaters for a swimming pool were missing in a box that came from the US West Coast. To prove the pilferage complaint, the complainant took pictures of the fist-size gaping hole in the box.

If a freight forwarder is found to be scamming Filipinos overseas of their *balikbayan* boxes, the Fair Trade and Enforcement Bureau (FTEB) may impose monetary fines, suspension or cancellation of accreditation.

"Once we find out they have liability there is a fine of P50,000 for first offense. Second offense, there is a cease and desist order. Third is closure," said.

If a settlement is reached between the forwarder and the complainant, the forwarder has to pay specific fees to the complainant and to the DTI office as well for culpability.

Quizon said that if the com-



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plainant wants to pursue a criminal case against the forwarder, he should file a case before a regular court. The DTI handles only administrative cases.

To lessen cases of Filipinos getting victimized and curb the malfeasance of some freight forwarders, the DTI regularly holds roadshows and information drives abroad to educate overseas Filipinos on how to protect their shipments.

Quizon said the roadshows have been very successful in imparting practical tips and information to overseas Filipinos, particu-



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larly the OFWs who are usual victims of unscrupulous forwarders.

Here are some practical tips to protect *balikbayan* box shipments:

- Book your *balikbayan* boxes only with cargo consolidator/freight forwarders accredited by the Fair Trade and Enforcement Bureau if by sea or the Civil Aeronautics Authority of the Philippines if by air. Senders can check the consolidator/forwarder's name on www.dti.gov.ph under the section of the Consumer Welfare and Business Regulation or through the Philippine Consulate office overseas.

- Monitor regular advisories and alerts at www.dti.gov.ph.

- Organize your box and declare your shipment by completing a detailed list of the contents and their value. If possible, include the description and brand of each item. Attach one copy of the list outside the box; place another copy of the list inside the box so the recipient can ascertain if any item is missing.

- Secure transport or

particular destination.

- Get the complete name and contact details of the forwarder's agent in the Philippines, and ensure that such information are indicated in the official receipt or transport document.

- Monitor the movement of your cargo from the point of origin to destination to ensure proper shipment and delivery.

- Inform your consignee to check your cargo with the agent in the Philippines even before the cargo arrives.

- For cases of pilferage, lost item, or non-delivery, file an immediate claim or complaint with the customer service of the freight forwarder. You may also file a complaint directly to the Philippine Shippers Bureau at 2nd Floor Department of Trade and Industry Bldg. 361 Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City, or call the DTI-Direct Hotline 02-7513330. ■

BUREAU OF CUSTOMS' ONLINE TRACKING SYSTEM

THE Bureau of Customs has launched an online tracking system that will enable recipients of *balikbayan* boxes to check on the status of their packages.

Customs Commissioner John Phillip Sevilla said on Dec. 2 it was the agency's "way of helping our *kababayans* find their *balikbayan* boxes when they encounter problems."

"We have received several complaints from families of overseas Filipino workers blaming the bureau for their lost boxes," he said.

With the tracker, Sevilla said "the public will no longer be given the run-around by people responsible for delivering their *balikbayan* boxes."

According to the BOC head, the tracker "contains the list of all *balikbayan* box shipments lodged by local cargo forwarders with Customs, their countries of origin, ports of entry in the Philippines and their bills of lading with the number of the shipments."

To access the *balikbayan* box tracker, go to the Bureau of Customs website (<http://customs.gov.ph>) and click the "Balikbayan Box Tracker" banner.

The tracker also "contains the name of the foreign forwarder, name of the local forwarder or broker, entry date filed, date cleared, and the current status (of the shipment)."

"Families expecting *balikbayan* boxes should know the name of the forwarder and the bill of lading number to be able to track the shipment where the box is included," Sevilla explained.

Balikbayan boxes sent from abroad are "usually consolidated into batches and placed in one container van aboard a cargo vessel bound for the Philippines.

Each container van has about 400 *balikbayan* boxes. Shipments from Asia typically arrive here in 15 to 20 days while those from North America or Europe arrive in 55 to 65 days. The local cargo forwarder handles the customs clearance of the entire shipment, as well as the delivery of each box to the intended recipient in the country, the BOC public information and assistance office.

The Department of Trade and Industry expects the online tracking system to "lessen, if not totally eliminate consumer complaints on loss, non-delivery and pilferage of *balikbayan* boxes."

"Simultaneously, the tracker can serve as a venue for accredited Philippine sea freight forwarders to police their own ranks and prevent questionable acts and dealings," said DTI Consumer Protection Group Undersecretary Victorio Mario Dimagiba.

To date, the DTI's Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau has accredited 654 Philippine sea freight forwarders.

An estimated 5.5 million *balikbayan* boxes are sent to the Philippines each year, about 40 percent of which arrive here from September to December.

About 65 percent of the shipments are received at the Manila International Container Port while the rest are shipped through the Port of Manila, as well as Cebu, Davao and the Subic Freeport in Zambales. ■