



Disaster predicted at Rotterdam from new container weight verification regime (by Gavin van Marle)

Dutch freight forwarder VCK Logistics is the latest company to warn that new container weight verification regulations could cause chaos in the supply chain.

The firm has completed a pilot weighing scheme that saw large discrepancies between declared and actual weights.

The tests saw 240 export containers weighed, partly to refine its process before the new rules come into force on 1 July, and to check variations between declared and actual weights.

“It was terrible,” Rob van Steensel, general manager at VCK said, “The average variation was 14%.”

The IMO has set a variance limit of 5%, and containers which exceed this will not be loaded onto vessels. In addition, Mr van Steensel said, shippers would be levied a €350 fine “and miss that sailing, which means they will likely wait a week until the next sailing and pay seven days’ demurrage”. The smallest variance – from a manufacturer that used the second method of adding the weight of the cargo to the container’s tare weight – was just 2%, but most of its shipments were identical.

He said: “For large producers, such as Heineken, it is relatively easy – they know how much each bottle weighs and how many bottles go into a container; it’s the same with every shipment so the calculated method works.”

VCK is installing two weighbridges in its facilities in Rotterdam, which Mr van Steensel said was at the request of a major customer. “My largest customer said that they were willing to sign a five-year contract if I made the investment and installed the weighbridges. On the basis of serving our clients, we went ahead. “But we will not be offering this service to forwarders or shippers who are not our customers.” The system will need to be calibrated and then registered with the authorities as certified weighing equipment. Once in use it will send the container weight to VCK’s system, which will then be transmitted to the shipping line via EDI.

However, Mr van Steensel warned that time was fast running out for other forwarders.

“No one is doing anything about this – it is madness that people are not trying to prepare. “To build a weighbridge in Holland I needed to apply for a permit from the local government. That was submitted in November and I received the permit at the beginning of March – it then takes eight weeks to construct – ours will be ready in June,” he said.

The potential for severe congestion in Rotterdam is huge – the port processes 10,000 export containers a week, but has just five weighbridges.

At a very rough calculation, if every container is to be weighed, and each weighbridge is in round-the-clock operation, each will have to weigh at least 11 containers every hour