

Unacceptable vs. Acceptable Cargo Descriptions

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Reference Guide

A precise cargo description is clear, concise, and written in plain language, detailed enough for CBP to identify the size, shape, and characteristics of the commodity. Only the cargo description itself belongs in this field; unrelated details such as personally identifiable information, packaging type, or carrier disclaimers should not be included.

The table below is a guide to acceptable and unacceptable descriptions. It is not exhaustive and continues to expand as new examples are identified. Entries in the Acceptable column illustrate the level of detail expected; they are examples, not a restrictive list of approved terms.

Unacceptable	Acceptable
"Brand" or "Trade Mark" names by themselves i.e., "Bubbles Brand"	"Bubbles Brand" Laundry Detergent
"Brand" or "Trade Mark" names by themselves	Laundry Detergent
Animals	Horse
	Poultry
	Bovine
Apparel/Clothing/Garments	Shoes, Footwear
Wearing Apparel, Ladies' Apparel, Men's Apparel	Women's Dresses
	Men's Shirts
	Boy's Jackets
Appliances	Refrigerator
	Stove
	Microwave Oven
	Coffee Machines
Accessories	Hair Elastics
	Sunglasses
	Socks
Auto Parts	Air Filters
	Automobile Brakes
	Automotive Windshield

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Bill of Lading, Sea Waybill, Air Manifest or a reference to another bill of lading number	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Caps	Baseball Caps
	Blasting Caps
	Bottle Caps
	Hub Caps
Chemicals, hazardous	Actual Chemical Name (not brand name):
	U.N. HAZMAT Code Identifier
Chemicals, non-hazardous	Aluminum Potassium Sulfate
	Methyl Alcohol
	U.N. HAZMAT Code Identifier
Cleaning Products	Detergents
	Mops
	Window Cleaner
Company Business	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Consolidated (on house or simple bills)	Consolidated (only on master bills, where there will be several house bills of varying descriptions)
Consumer Goods	A clear and concise description of the item is required
Crafts/Craft Supplies	Pipe Cleaners
Daily Necessities	A clear and concise description of the item is required (e.g. Plastic Comb, Cosmetic Mirror, Deodorant, Diapers)
Necessities	A clear and concise description of the item is required (e.g. Shampoo, Hand Cream, Toilet Paper)
Handicrafts	Construction paper, cotton balls, pipe cleaners, pompoms, decorative objects made by hand
Electronic Goods	Computers, Monitors, Televisions, Mobile Telephones, DVD players, Electronic Toys, Video Game Consoles, Electronic Dolls
Electronics	Computers, Monitors, Televisions, Mobile Telephones, DVD players, Electronic Toys, Video Game Consoles, Electronic Dolls
Equipment	Oil Well Equipment, Hydro-Electric Turbine
Industrial Equipment	Poultry Equipment, Compact Farm Tractor

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Film	Camera Film
	Polyethylene Film
	Polyester Film
Flooring	Wood Flooring
	Carpet
	Ceramic Tile
	Marble Flooring
Foodstuffs	Packaged Rice, Bulk Rice, Mangos, Baking Flour
Food	Pasta, Canned Tuna, Corn Tortillas
Meat	Fresh Beef, Frozen Chicken
Fish	Live Trout, Frozen Salmon, Canned Tuna
Produce/Assorted Produce/Mixed produce/Mixed Vegetables	Fresh Oranges, Frozen Broccoli, Canned Peaches
Pet food	Canned Dog Food, Dry Cat Food
Cases of Food	Juice, Olive Oil
Snacks	Soda, Crackers, Potato Chips
Gifts	Dolls, Basketball, Toy Car
Novelty Items	Remote Control Cars, Toy Phone
Frames	Picture Frames
Freight Prepaid	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Household Goods	Acceptable only when goods are Personal / Used Household Effects transported by a commercial carrier (Goods accounted under a Personal Effects Accounting Document)
Personal Effects	Acceptable only when goods are Personal / Used Household Effects transported by a commercial carrier (Goods accounted under a Personal Effects Accounting Document)
Indecipherable descriptions ex. "RED SMOOTH MODULAR", "CDRE", "D6T PARTS", "RIPE", "Z", "2"	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Iron	Iron Pipes
	Iron Plates

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Leather Articles	Saddles
	Leather Handbags
	Leather Jackets
	Shoes
Machines	Sewing Machines
	Printing Machines
Machine Parts	Oil Pumps
	Silicone Seals
	Car Engines
Medical Supplies	Medical Gloves, N95 Masks, Rolls of Gauze
Biologicals	Blood, plasma, tissue, semen
Medical Device	Dialysis Machine
Laboratory Goods	Syringes
	Glass vials for laboratory use
Medication/Pharmaceuticals	Insulin, Allergy Medication, with the common name or chemical name
Metal	Ingots of metal (precious or otherwise)
	Round bars of steel or other metal
	Deformed bars/rebars (of metal)
	Plates (of metal)
	Billets (of metal)
	Slabs (of metal)
	Pipes (of metal)
	Beams (of metal)
	Tubes/Tubing (of metal)
	Angles, shapes and sections (of metal)
	Sheets (of metal)
	Expanded metal
	Flat bars (of metal)
	Strand wire (of metal)

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Oil	Mineral Oil
	Motor Oil
	Olive Oil
Online Retailer	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Online Retailer Shipment	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Ore	Iron Ore
	Copper Ore
Packaging	Corrugated Cardboard Boxes
Boxes	Mailing Envelopes
Cartons	Plastic Bubble Wrap
Palletized Shipment	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Paper	Paper Rolls
	Wrapping Paper
	Paper Pulp
	Paper Towel
	Printing Paper
Pipes	Plastic Pipes
	PVC Pipes
	Steel Pipes
Plants/Flowers	Tulips, Daisies, Roses
Cuttings	Cedar Saplings
	Tomato Plants
Plastic Goods	Plastic Kitchenware
Industrial Plastics	Plastic Toys
	Plastic Sheets
	Plastic Tubes
Polyurethane	Polyurethane Threads
	Polyurethane Medical Gloves

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Powder	Flea Powder
	Baby Powder
	Corn Starch
Promotional Items	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Pump	Oil Pump
	Water Pump
	Bicycle Pump
Rubber Articles	Rubber Hoses
	Tires
	Rubber Toys
	Rubber Conveyor Belts
Rods	Welding Rods
	Rebar
	Aluminum Rods
	Reactor Rods
Sample	Shampoo Sample
	Conditioner Sample
	Makeup Sample
Scrap	Plastic Scrap
	Aluminum Scrap
	Iron Scrap
Serial Number only ("SN HAFR997MJ02041010")	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Shingles	Asphalt Shingles
	Steel Shingles
	Wood Shingles
Spare Parts	Cellphone Replacement Screen
	New Automobile Breaks

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Sporting Goods	Hockey Sticks
	Soccer Balls
	Goal Nets
STC (Said to Contain)	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
General Cargo	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
FAK (Freight of All Kinds)	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
"No Description"	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
'Misc/Miscellaneous'	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Various	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
General	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Unknown	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
UNK	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
XX	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
NOI (Not Otherwise Indicated)	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
NES (Note Elsewhere Specified)	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Steel	Steel Plates
	Steel Coils
Supplements	Vitamins
	Protein Powder
Supplies	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Stuff	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Taxable Groceries	Ice Cream
	Potato Chips
Textiles	Carpets/Rugs
	Silk
	Finished Fabric Rolls
Thing	A clear and concise description of the item is required – see other acceptable descriptions for examples
Tiles	Ceramic Tiles
	Marble Tiles
Toiletries/Bathroom Products	Towels
	Toothbrushes
	Shampoo
Tools	Screwdrivers, Wrenches, Hammers
	Cordless Drills, Circular Saws, Wired Impact Drivers, Pneumatic Ratchets
	Industrial Lathe, Band Saw, Reciprocating Saw
Toys/Games	Wooden Children's Toys
	Plastic Children's Toys
	Board Games
	Console Games
Vehicles	Cars, Trucks, Buses, Recreational Vehicle
	Tractors, Combines
	Bicycles
	Boats
Wires	Steel Wire
	Copper Wire
	Auto Harness
	Coiled Wire (Industrial)

Unacceptable	Acceptable
Wood	Hemlock logs with bark
	Empty Wood Pallets
	Cut Lumber

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, CBP Publication #3714-0524