

Air waybill (AWB)

The Air Waybill (AWB) is a pivotal document in the realm of international air cargo transportation, crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMBs) to comprehend. Whether they manage logistics independently or through a trusted [freight forwarder](#), understanding the AWB is vital to avoid unforeseen penalties and shipment delays.

What is an Air Waybill (AWB) in International Shipping?

The AWB, also known as a consignment note, is a key document issued by carriers for the air transportation of goods. It serves as both a receipt for the shipper and evidence of the agreement between the airline and the shipper. This standard form, provided by the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#), facilitates customs clearance and shipment tracking across various countries.

Who is Responsibility for Filing the AWB?

The airline is tasked with issuing the AWB, which acts as a contract for carriage, thereby reducing the administrative burden on SMBs.

If you're an SMB handling shipping, you'll likely need to supply the necessary details to have the Air Waybill (AWB) prepared.

The 2 Different Types of Air Waybills

Distinguishing Between Master and House Air Waybills

Two primary types of AWBs exist, each serving a specific purpose:

- **Master Air Waybill (MAWB):** Issued by the primary carrier, this document establishes the contract between the freight forwarder and the airline for the transportation of consolidated goods between airports.

- **House Air Waybill (HAWB):** Used by freight forwarders for the onward shipment of goods, the HAWB serves as a receipt, contract of carriage, and document of title for consolidated packages.

What Information is Required on an Air Waybill AWB?

Essential Information on the Air Waybill

The AWB contains comprehensive details about the shipping process, including:

- **Goods Description:** A detailed account of the shipment's contents.
- **AWB Identifier:** A unique 11-digit number for tracking the shipment.
- **Origin and Destination:** Details of the shipment's starting point and final destination.
- **Sender and Receiver Details:** Contact and address information of the involved parties.
- **Shipment Specifications:** Weight, volume, and dimensions of the cargo.
- **Cost Details:** Breakdown of shipment expenses and payment responsibilities.
- **Special Handling Instructions:** Directions for the carrier to ensure safe transportation of the shipment.
- **Customs Information:** Data required for customs clearance, including product classification HS codes.
- **Insurance Coverage:** Details of any cargo insurance policies.
- **Flight Schedule:** Information about the cargo flight, including airports and times.

What is an AWB Number?

The Air Waybill (AWB) number is a unique 11-digit number used to identify each piece of cargo during the shipping process. The important thing to keep in mind is that this number isn't just made up of random digits. The structure consists of three key components:

1. **Airline Prefix:** The first three digits represent the airline, as assigned by

IATA.

2. **Serial Number:** The following seven digits uniquely identify the shipment.
3. **Check Digit:** The final digit, calculated from the previous ten, ensures the number's accuracy.

Legal Compliance and Consequences

Accurate completion of the AWB is mandatory. Inaccuracies can lead to shipment delays, fines, or even seizure of goods. Attention to detail in AWB preparation is crucial for a smooth and compliant shipping process.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Air Waybill

- What is the Function of an Air Waybill?

The AWB provides detailed shipment information, ensuring it reaches the correct destination and can be tracked during transit.

- How Does the AWB Process Operate?

The shipper or their agent supplies shipment details, which are used by the carrier, freight forwarder, and customs officials.

- Why is the Air Waybill Important for SMBs in Air Cargo Shipping?

For SMBs involved in air exports or imports, the AWB is necessary to inform the carrier about the cargo, its origin, destination, sender, and recipient.

- How is the Information on the AWB Utilized?

The AWB guides all parties involved in the shipment's journey, from origin to destination, providing handling instructions and aiding in customs inspections.

- Is the Air Waybill Negotiable?

Unlike some Bills of Lading, the AWB is non-negotiable and does not transfer ownership but serves as proof of receipt.

- How Does the AWB Relate to Other Shipping Documents?

The AWB complements other documents like the Commercial Invoice and Packing List, providing a comprehensive view of the cargo's journey.

- What are the Legal Implications of Incorrect AWB Filing?

Incorrect AWB filing can result in transportation delays, penalties, or even the confiscation of the shipment. Accuracy and completeness are essential.