

Repurposed freight containers – Information sheet

Purpose

This document sets out the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator's (NHVR) position that repurposed freight containers are not freight containers for the purpose of vehicles operating under Class 1 mass or dimension exemptions.

Background

Class 1 restricted access vehicles (e.g. load platforms and low loaders) cannot transport freight containers. This restriction stops a vehicle loaded with general freight in excess of prescribed mass limits or dimension limits becoming eligible to operate under a Class 1 exemption (e.g. using a low loader and operating under a Class 1 mass exemption with general freight).

It has become common for freight containers to be modified (repurposed) for a variety of purposes other than goods transport.

Containers and repurposed containers

The NHVR does not consider a repurposed freight container to be a freight container for the purpose of section 116 of the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL).

Under the HVNL, a **freight container** means a:

- a) re-usable container of the kind mentioned in AS 3711.1 that is designed for repeated use for transporting goods; or
- b) re-usable container of the same or a similar design and construction to a container mentioned in paragraph (a) though of different dimensions.

This provision places emphasis on the freight-carrying capacity of a container. The intention of the legislation is to limit the ability of freight containers to carry general freight as a Class 1 vehicle.

The NHVR considers that a repurposed container for which the purpose is something **other** than carrying freight is no longer a container in function, even if it has been converted from a container to something else. This includes, for example, objects converted from a container or built on a container frame.

Therefore, because the object can no longer be used to transport freight, it is no longer a container and can be transported under a Class 1 mass or dimension exemption.

What is a repurposed container?

Under this interpretation, a **repurposed freight container** is a freight container that has been permanently modified to perform another purpose in a way that renders the container unsuitable for the multi-modal transport of goods.

Freight containers with minor modifications, such as additional doors, that do not significantly affect the container's suitability for multi-modal transport of goods are **not** repurposed freight containers.

Mass and dimension limits

The mass and dimension limits for transporting a repurposed freight container are the same as those applying to the Class 1 exemption(s) under which the heavy vehicle is operating.

Carrying items in or with the container

A repurposed shipping container itself may carry equipment and goods incidental to the container's purpose. This includes testing equipment or chemicals for a water treatment plant, or furniture and fittings for emergency housing. These items may be considered effectively part of the repurposed shipping container—even though they may be divisible from the container itself.

Additional items may also be carried. They are subject to the same conditions as additional items on any type of Class 1 load carrying vehicle. Their carriage is allowed only if the vehicle and loads do not exceed the General Mass Limits and the additional items are loaded within standard dimension limits. More information about conditions of carrying additional items is available in the NHVR information sheet [Multiple Loads on Class 1 Load-Carrying Vehicles](#).

Examples of repurposed containers

The following are examples of repurposed containers:

- water treatment units, generators and other plant integrated with a repurposed container
- relocatable buildings, including offices, accommodation and workshops

- integrated systems for which the repurposed container is a system component (e.g. emergency modular accommodation systems, modular sewage treatment plant).

This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Transporting a repurposed container

Heavy vehicles transporting repurposed freight containers may be considered Class 1 vehicles and be eligible to operate under Class 1 mass and dimension exemptions.

Some relevant Class 1 exemptions include:

- *Multi-State Class 1 Load Carrying Vehicle Dimension Exemption Notice*
- *Multi-State Class 1 Load Carrying Vehicle Mass Exemption Notice*
- Class 1 load carrying vehicle access permits.

The notices and supporting information sheets can be found on the [NHVR website](https://www.nhvr.gov.au).

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