

Wood Packaging Rules (ISPM 15) for Pallets, Crates and Dunnage

SourcingFrom

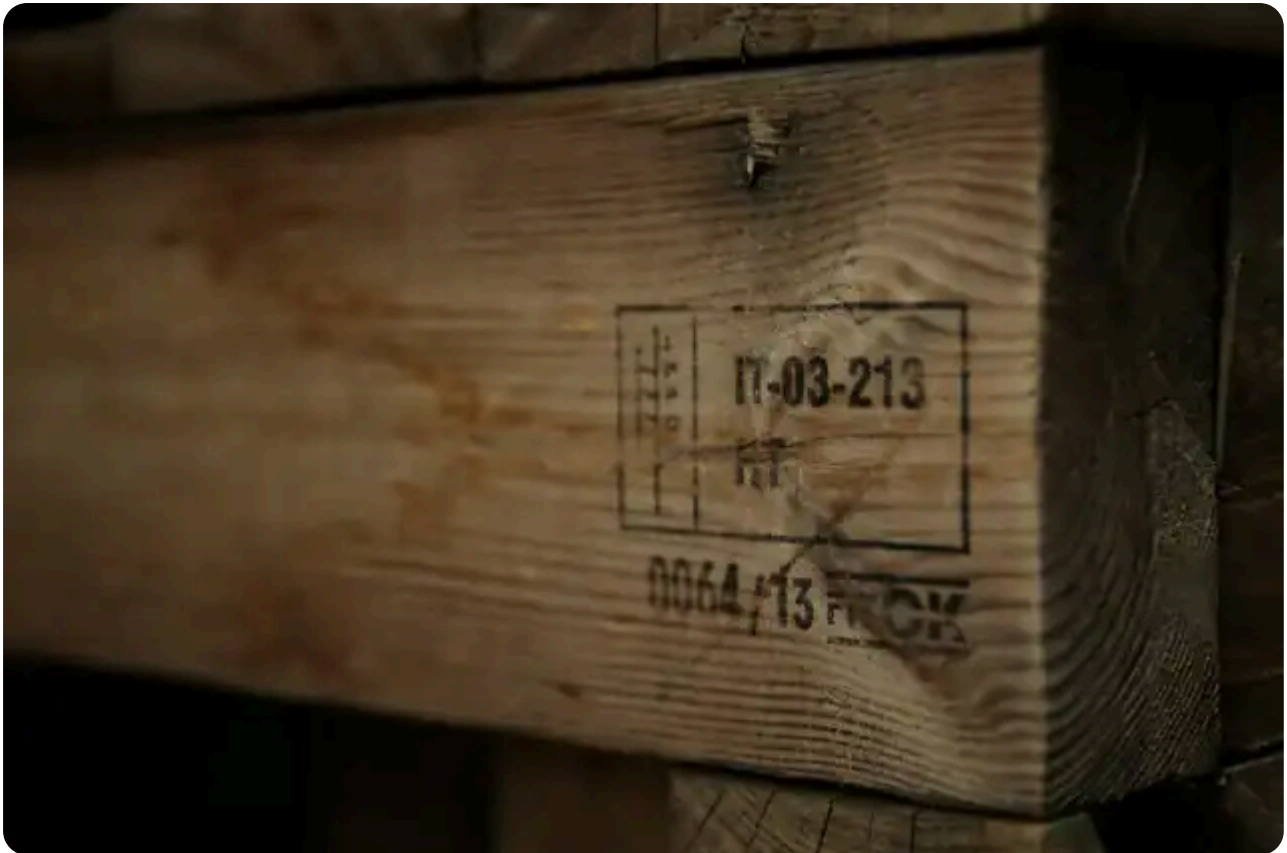
Updated 28 Sept 2026 10 min read

ISPM 15 is the international rule for raw wood packaging such as pallets, crates and dunnage: it must be debarked, treated and marked, whatever the product inside. This guide explains how to read the mark, what is exempt, what each market does without it, and the purchase order clause to use for Indian shipments.

The Short Version

- The rule follows the packaging, not the product, and biosecurity can hold a container that customs has already cleared.
- Plywood packaging is exempt only if it is wholly processed wood, a plywood crate on solid-timber skids is not.
- The importer pays for treatment, destruction, storage or re-export when packaging fails.
- ISPM 15 pallets are not standard in India, so ask for heat-treated, marked packaging in writing.
- Australia suspended or saw the withdrawal of thirteen Indian fumigation providers by July 2026.

The goods can be perfect and the paperwork spotless, and your container still sits at the port because of the pallet underneath. In May 2026 an Australian clearance firm put it bluntly: "a missing ISPM 15 stamp on a wooden pallet or an unverified furniture treatment can stop your entire delivery in its tracks" ([LinkedIn, Australian clearance firm, May 2026](#)). That firm sells clearance, so read it as a warning from someone with an interest. But the rule behind it is real, and it applies in every big import market.



This guide follows one shipment through that rule – an Indian container of brass lamps in wooden crates, headed for a Melbourne warehouse. We'll cover what the mark means, what's exempt, what happens at the border without it, and the clause to put in your purchase order. One honest caveat before we start. We read the Australian, US and UK rules at source, but New Zealand's and the EU's official sites blocked our automated reads, so those parts are marked as reported, not verified.

1. The Rule Follows the Packaging, Not the Product

ISPM 15 is an international standard for packaging made from raw wood – pallets, crates, packing cases, cable drums, spools and dunnage, the loose timber that braces cargo inside a container ([ISPM 15, section 2](#)). Raw wood can carry beetles and larvae across borders, so the wood must be debarked, treated by an approved method and marked to show it.

The part first-time importers miss is that it has nothing to do with what you bought. Cotton towels on untreated pallets break the rule as surely as a crate of furniture does. So our brass lamps are a metal product, and the lamps don't matter here at all. The crates and the pallets they sit on do.

And biosecurity is a separate check from customs. The Australian clearance firm above describes an unmarked pallet stopping a delivery after customs had already released it, and a pallet maker says the same thing (two vendors on LinkedIn, 2026, founder-confirmed). Customs clearance tells you the duty is settled. It tells you nothing about the wood.

2. How to Read the Mark

The mark is a small stamped box with the IPPC symbol on the left and three codes on the right (ISPM 15, Annex 2). The first is the ISO country code of the country where the wood was treated or the packaging made, which for India is IN. The second is the number the national plant protection body gave the maker or treatment provider, so a bad pallet can be traced back to a firm. The third is the treatment code.

There are four treatment codes you'll see. HT is heat treatment, with the core of the wood held at 56°C for at least 30 continuous minutes. MB is methyl bromide fumigation, DH is dielectric heating and SF is sulphuryl fluoride. Methyl bromide can't be used on wood thicker than 20 cm, and the standard asks countries to move away from it because it damages the ozone layer. We'd ask for HT every time, and there's a second reason for that which we'll get to in section 5.

Code	Treatment	Note
HT	Heat treatment, core at 56°C for at least 30 continuous minutes	Our preference
MB	Methyl bromide fumigation	Not on wood thicker than 20 cm, countries asked to move away from it
DH	Dielectric heating	
SF	Sulphuryl fluoride	

The standard is fussy about how the mark is applied too. It must not be hand drawn, it should sit on at least two opposite sides of each unit, and red and orange ink are to be avoided because they flag dangerous goods. A hand-drawn mark on a pallet is a bigger warning sign than no mark at all, because it means someone knew a mark was expected.

Is a stamped pallet compliant forever? Only if nobody alters it. A repaired pallet needs treated wood and its own mark, and a rebuilt one must have the old marks ground or painted out ([ISPM 15, section 4.3](#)). And a pallet that picks up live pests after treatment can still be ordered for treatment, export or destruction, stamp or no stamp ([DAFF, ISPM 15](#)).

3. What's Exempt, and the Word That Catches People

The standard exempts packaging that's low risk because of how it's made ([ISPM 15, section 2.1](#)) –

- packaging made entirely of thin wood, 6 mm thick or less
- packaging made wholly of processed wood such as plywood, particle board, OSB or veneer bonded with glue, heat or pressure
- sawdust, wood shavings and wood wool

- wood fixed permanently to a freight container, and some wine barrels and processed gift boxes

Plastic pallets and metal crates sit outside the rule altogether, which is why some importers simply ask for them.



Here's the catch - "wholly". A plywood crate on solid-timber skids isn't wholly processed wood, and that's exactly how a lot of export crates are built. Australia says it plainly: packaging that combines solid timber with plywood or reconstituted wood must still be treated and declared ([DAFF, timber and bamboo packaging](#)). So back to our brass lamps. If the crates are all plywood then only the pallets need the mark. If the crate base is solid timber then the whole crate needs treatment and a mark, and you won't know which one you've got unless you ask for photos.

4. What Happens at the Border Without It

ISPM 15 lets the importing country detain the goods, then remove, treat, destroy or reship the packaging ([ISPM 15, section 4.6](#)). Each country uses that power in its own way.

Australia treats non-compliant wood on arrival, "or it may be exported or disposed of at the importer's expense" ([DAFF, timber and bamboo packaging](#)). In the US an inspector "may order the immediate reexport" of wood packaging that arrives without the mark, which can mean the goods go back with it ([7 CFR 319.40-3\(b\)\(3\)](#)). Great Britain requires any goods on wood packaging to meet ISPM 15 ([GOV.UK](#)). The EU applies ISPM 15 through its plant health rules, and New Zealand through MPI's import health standard for wood packaging (both reported from our desk research, because the official sites blocked automated reads when we checked in September 2026).

For the UAE we couldn't find the rule on an official page. Suppliers in the Gulf say the GCC applies ISPM 15, but they sell pallets, so treat that as unconfirmed and ask your broker before the first shipment.

Notice who pays in every one of those rules. It's you, the importer. The cost stacks up as treatment or disposal, storage and container detention while the box waits, labour to repack onto new pallets, and freight if it goes back. Charges vary by port and provider, so check the current ones with your customs broker rather than guessing.

5. Why Australia Is the Strictest, and Why the Fumigator Matters

Australia builds ISPM 15 into its import conditions (BICON) and adds paperwork on top. Whoever packs a container completes a packing declaration, and solid timber packaging goes on it ([DAFF, timber and](#)

bamboo packaging). The department also runs random checks on cargo, so a clean declaration doesn't mean nobody looks.

Australia also watches who does the treating, and 2026 showed why. Between January and July its industry notices suspended Indian fumigation providers one notice at a time, and on 10 July it said thirteen Indian providers had been suspended from, or had withdrawn from, its offshore fumigation scheme (DAFF notices 2026, notice 118–2026). Indian press reports put the number far higher, but we'd go with the department's own count.

That notice is about methyl bromide treatment of goods and containers, not pallet stamps. The lesson carries over anyway. An Australian biosecurity consultant summed it up in August: "Having a treatment certificate in the shipping documentation does not automatically mean the biosecurity risk has been adequately managed" (LinkedIn, Australian biosecurity consultant, August 2026). A certificate is only as good as the provider's standing on the day. This is the second reason we prefer HT for packaging – a kiln-treated pallet doesn't depend on a fumigator staying on anyone's approved list.

6. Why Indian Shipments Need You to Ask

None of this is special to India. ISPM 15 is the same wherever the pallet was built. What's specific is the habit on the ground. A UK logistics voice put it frankly in 2026: ISPM 15 pallets "are not standard in India and considered an unnecessary added cost for the shipper" (r/logistics, UK logistics voice, April 2026, via our forum–signal log). The same threads describe Indian containers floor-loaded with no pallets at all, which avoids ISPM 15 but leaves you paying for slow hand unloading at Felixstowe or a US warehouse (three voices, UK and US, 2026, founder–confirmed).



That's not a knock on Indian exporters. A supplier who ships loose cartons to buyers who never asked for pallets is doing what the market paid for. The fix is simply to ask, in writing, before the order is packed.

India does make the check easier than most origins. The plant protection directorate links to its list of accredited treatment providers from its home page, so a supplier who names one can be checked against it ([PPQS](#)).

7. The Purchase Order Clause

Here's the clause we'd put in the PO for our brass lamps, and it works for any origin –

1. "All wood packaging, including dunnage, is ISPM 15 treated and marked, or is plastic or wholly processed wood."

2. "Treatment is heat treatment (HT). No methyl bromide without our written approval."
3. "The mark is stamped or branded, never hand drawn, on two opposite sides of each unit."
4. "Photos of the mark on each packing type, and of the dunnage, before the container is sealed."
5. "Name the treatment provider or packaging maker."

Three things still slip through, even with a good clause. Dunnage gets cut to length at loading, and a short offcut can lose its mark, which is why the standard says pieces too small to carry the whole mark shouldn't be used. Repaired pallets often carry several marks, which is normal, but a new unmarked board on an old pallet is not. And "fumigated" on the paperwork is a certificate for the goods, not an ISPM 15 mark on the wood. You may need both, and one doesn't stand in for the other.

If you'd rather someone at the Indian end checked the packing and the marks before the container is sealed, [SourcingSync](#) does that. For the wider pre-shipment checks, see [quality control in India](#).

SourcingFrom Intelligence

powered by [Kirnova](#) - the intelligence company

01 Biosecurity stops containers that customs has already cleared. An Australian clearance firm and a pallet maker both describe a missing ISPM 15 stamp holding a whole delivery after customs release. ([LinkedIn](#), [Australian clearance firm](#), [May 2026](#), two vendors, founder-confirmed.)

02 Certified pallets aren't the default in India. Unless the buyer asks, many Indian exporters use unmarked pallets or floor-load. Write it into the PO. ([r/logistics](#), [UK logistics voice](#), [April 2026](#), three voices, UK and US.)

03 A treatment certificate is only as good as the provider's current status. Australia suspended or saw the withdrawal of thirteen Indian fumigation providers by July 2026. Check the provider before loading, and prefer HT for packaging. (*DAFF notice 118-2026, 10 Jul 2026.*)

What we don't know yet

- The UAE's official wood packaging rule. We found none on a government page.
- How often Indian containers are held for wood packaging. No regulator publishes it by origin.

8. The Rules by Market, as of September 2026

We keep this part current and date it. The method above doesn't change when it does.

Australia. ISPM 15 is built into BICON, solid timber goes on the packing declaration, and the fumigation provider's standing matters. Non-compliant wood is treated, exported or destroyed at your expense (Verified).

United States. ISPM 15 applies under 7 CFR 319.40–3, and unmarked wood packaging can be ordered for immediate re-export (Verified).

United Kingdom (Great Britain). Goods on wood packaging must meet ISPM 15 (Verified).

European Union and New Zealand. Both apply ISPM 15, the EU through its plant health rules and New Zealand through MPI's import health standard (Reported, official sites not readable by us). Ask your broker for the current text.

UAE. Not confirmed on an official page (Unknown). Ask your broker.

FAQ

Is plywood exempt? ^

Wholly plywood packaging is. A plywood box on solid-wood runners isn't.

Do I need a certificate as well as the mark? v

HT or MB? v

Who pays when a pallet fails? v

9. Next Steps

So for our Melbourne lamps, the whole fix fits in five lines of a PO and a set of photos before the doors close. That's cheap insurance against a container waiting at the port for a reason that has nothing to do with lamps.

- The border rules for your market: [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), [UK](#), [US](#), [EU](#).
- If the goods themselves are wood: [timber legality rules by country](#).
- Which ports and lanes your container will use: [sea freight routes](#).
- Other biosecurity checks on natural goods: [biosecurity for natural goods](#).
- Who books and checks the container at origin: [choosing a freight forwarder](#).
- Add a line for possible port charges in the [landed-cost calculator](#) on your first shipment.