

The US-Side Costs First-Time India Importers Miss



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Duty is only one line on a US import from India. You also pay federal user fees (the merchandise processing fee on formal entries and, by sea, the harbor maintenance fee), a customs broker who often bills per entry and per tariff line, a customs bond, the ISF filing, destination port and freight-station charges, trucking from the port, and exam and storage costs if CBP selects the shipment. Couriers bundle some of this into their bill and sometimes get the tariff wrong.

The Short Version

- Federal fees come on top of duty: MPF on formal entries and HMF on ocean cargo, both charged on value.
- Brokerage is often billed per line, so a many-SKU Indian order costs more to clear than a two-line one.
- For an inland or residential delivery, the truck from the US port can cost more than the ocean leg from India.
- If CBP examines your box, you pay the exam station, the moves and the storage.
- Couriers bundle clearance into one bill and sometimes assess the tariff wrongly. Audit the entries line by line.

Besides duty, a first import from India into the US usually carries federal user fees, customs brokerage, a customs bond, the security filing for ocean cargo, port and freight-station charges, the truck from the port, and, if your box is picked for inspection, exam and storage costs. Most of these are charged per entry, per line or per container, so they weigh hardest on small first orders.

"My customs broker billed me per line item. Nobody warned me." That was a first-time US importer of India containers in June 2026, who added that "the first number is rarely the real one" (a US online sellers' forum, Reported, and some readers doubted the post, so treat it as one voice). This post walks through every US-side line we can name, who bills it and when, so the second number is closer to the first. We give no amounts. Fees change and brokers set their own, so ask for each one in writing. The rates of duty themselves are on importing from India to the US.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 **Per-line brokerage catches India orders in particular.** Multi-SKU India orders spread across many tariff lines carry it where single-line orders don't. (*US importers on forums, 2025 and 2026, our review*)
- 02 **The truck can outrun the ship.** A buyer moving India goods through the Port of New York and New Jersey was told not to be surprised if trucking "cost you more than the entire journey from INDIA". (*r/logistics, Sep 2024, one thread*)
- 03 **CBP doesn't charge for exams, but you pay for them.** The importer "shall bear any expense involved in preparing the merchandise for CBP examination", and the exam station bills you for unloading and reloading. (*CBP, tips for new importers, read 18 Oct 2026*)

What we don't know yet

- ☐ Typical brokerage structures for India entries by port. Brokers don't publish them in a comparable way.

1. What Does the US Government Charge Besides Duty?

Two user fees, collected as part of the customs entry (CBP user fee table, read 18 October 2026, Verified).

The **merchandise processing fee (MPF)** applies to formal entries. It's charged as a percentage of the goods' value with a minimum and a maximum per entry, so it bites hardest on a small formal entry. Informal entries pay a smaller flat fee instead.

The **harbor maintenance fee (HMF)** applies to goods arriving by sea and is charged on value. Air cargo doesn't pay it.

Then there's the duty stack itself. Since 24 July 2026 most Indian goods pay the normal US rate plus a 10% Section 301 duty, filed on an extra chapter 99 line, and Section 232 goods pay a different rate. Each of those extra lines is another place for an error. The detail is on [the US trade page](#).

One threshold matters for budgeting. Formal entry applies above US\$250 for these goods, and de minimis is suspended for every country, so even a modest restock now needs a bond and usually a broker, as the US page sets out.

2. What Will the Customs Broker Bill?

You can file your own entries, but most first-time importers use a licensed broker, and CBP reminds you that even then "you, the importer of record, are ultimately responsible" for the entry, the duties and the fees ([CBP](#)).

Expect these lines from a broker, in some combination:

- **An entry fee** for preparing and filing the customs entry.
- **Per-line charges** for each tariff line beyond a set number. This is the one our first-time importer missed.
- **ISF filing**. Ocean cargo needs an Importer Security Filing 24 hours before loading abroad, and CBP says failure to comply "could ultimately result in monetary penalties, increased inspections and delay of cargo".

- **The customs bond**, single-entry or continuous, which the broker can arrange.
- **Other agency filings**, such as FDA for food, spices and cosmetics.
- **Disbursement charges** if the broker pays duty or fees for you.

Why does this hit India orders? Indian buyers often place many styles or sizes in one order, a rug range in six constructions, a homeware order across steel, brass and wood. Each different tariff line is a line on the entry. An order of forty SKUs on twelve tariff lines costs more to clear than one on two, before a single dollar of duty. Ask your broker for the full fee schedule before the first shipment, and ask how many lines your order will produce.

3. Why Can the Truck Cost More Than the Ship?

Because the ocean leg is priced in bulk and the last leg isn't. In September 2024 a buyer importing India goods through New Jersey "later realized that we would be responsible for handling the import formalities in the US", and a reply warned the trucking might cost more than the trip from India (r/logistics, Reported). Our research found the same pattern for inland and residential deliveries generally.

The lines that make up that last leg:

- **Destination terminal and port charges** billed by the carrier or its agent.
- **Freight-station charges for LCL**, for unloading the shared container and handling your share. These are often set after the cargo has sailed, as [why FOB India quotes and invoices differ](#) explains.
- **Drayage**, the truck from the port to your warehouse, plus any chassis, waiting time or residential delivery charges.
- **Demurrage and detention** if the container stays at the port or with you beyond the free days.

The fix is to get a door-delivered quote, not just the ocean rate. Ask the forwarder to quote to your warehouse, line by line, and to say which lines are estimates. If your warehouse is far inland, compare a port closer to it. Transit and port choices from India are on Mundra or Nhava Sheva.

4. What If CBP Picks Your Box for Inspection?

You pay, even though CBP doesn't. CBP has a right to examine any shipment, and its own guidance says that "in the course of normal operations, CBP does not charge for cargo examinations. However, there may still be costs involved for the importer" (CBP, Verified).

Those costs are the moves to and from a Centralized Examination Station, a privately run facility that unloads your container for the officers and reloads it after, then bills you for it. Storage runs while the box waits. The guidance notes that rates vary across the country.

You can't stop an exam, but you can make one less likely to drag on. Accurate descriptions, the right tariff codes on every line, "Made in India" marking on the goods and an invoice that matches the packing list all help. Keep a contingency line in your landed cost for it, especially on a first entry.

5. Does Shipping by Courier Avoid All This?

It bundles it, which isn't the same thing. An express courier clears the parcel and bills you one total for duty, fees and its own clearance charge. That's convenient, until the tariff is wrong. A US distributor importing from Europe and India said in November 2025 they'd "caught a number of incorrectly assessed tariffs that are starting to add up", and an ecommerce seller wrote in May 2026 that couriers' "HTS codes and duties are often incorrect" (r/smallbusiness and r/ecommerce, Reported). With the chapter 99 duties stacked on top, a wrong code costs more than it used to.

There's a bigger catch if your Indian supplier ships on its own courier account. The courier then files as importer of record, so refunds go to it and you lose sight of your own entries. That story is told in full on [low-value imports](#) and [who is the importer of record](#). Audit every courier entry line by line, and move to your own forwarder and broker once volume justifies it.

6. How Do You Budget the US Side Before the PO?

Work it out before you agree the price with your supplier, not after the goods land.

1. **Get a door-delivered freight quote**, with the US-side lines shown separately.
2. **Get your broker's fee schedule** and an estimate of how many tariff lines your order produces.
3. **Arrange the bond and ISF** before the goods are loaded in India.
4. **Add the user fees and the duty stack** for your lines, from the US trade page.
5. **Keep a contingency** for an exam, storage and demurrage on a first entry.

If you'd rather hand the whole chain to one team, from the Indian factory to a US broker and bond in your name, [SourcingSync](#) runs it for foreign buyers.

Questions Buyers Ask

What fees do I pay to US Customs besides duty? 

The merchandise processing fee on formal entries and, for sea cargo, the harbor maintenance fee, both charged on value. Section 301 or 232 duties may apply on top of the normal rate.

Why did my broker charge per line?



Is trucking from the US port really that expensive?



Who pays if CBP examines my container?



Is a courier cheaper than a broker for small shipments?

