

Why Do Indian Containers Arrive Floor-Loaded?



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Updated 18 Oct 2026 5 min read

Yes, it is normal. Many Indian exporters stuff cartons straight onto the container floor because it fits more goods in the box and saves the cost of pallets, and certified ISPM 15 pallets are not standard in India. The cost moves to your end, where hand unloading is slow and warehouses charge for it. If you want pallets, specify them in the purchase order: type, size, treatment, height, wrapping and photos of stuffing.

The Short Version

- Floor-loading is a normal choice in India, not carelessness. It saves the shipper pallet cost and container space.
- The bill moves to you as slow hand unloading, warehouse labour charges and longer container time.
- Wooden pallets must meet ISPM 15. Plastic pallets and slip sheets sit outside the rule.
- A supplier only palletises what the purchase order asks for, in writing.
- Ask for photos of the stuffing and the load plan before the container is sealed.

Because it's the normal way to ship from India, and on the supplier's side it makes sense. Stuffing cartons straight onto the floor fits more goods in the box and saves the cost of pallets, and certified ISPM 15 wooden pallets are not standard practice for many Indian shippers. The cost doesn't vanish, though. It moves to your end, where a floor-loaded container is unloaded by hand, slowly, and warehouses charge for the labour.

Importers in the UK and the US describe this the same way in our forum logs. One logistics reply put it plainly: "IPPC / ISPM15 wooden pallets are not standard in India and considered an unnecessary added cost for the

shipper". Another, on a thread about a container from India, said "Stuffing is not one of the strengths of Indian exporters" (our forum signal FS-SHP-038, 2026). This page explains why it happens, what it costs you, when floor-loading is the right call, and how to ask for something else. What the ISPM 15 mark means and how each border treats unmarked wood is on our [ISPM 15 guide](#), so we only touch it here.

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- 01 **Certified pallets are an extra the Indian shipper pays for.** UK-side logistics voices say ISPM 15 pallets are not standard in India and are seen as an unnecessary cost. (*Our forum signal FS-SHP-038, 2026*)
- 02 **The labour lands at destination.** A US thread on a floor-loaded India container quoted the unloading labour as a separate bill. (*FS-SHP-038, 2026*)
- 03 **Bad wood holds the box.** An Australian clearance firm wrote that a missing ISPM 15 stamp on a pallet "can stop your entire delivery in its tracks". (*Our forum signal FS-SHP-007, 2026*)

1. Is Floor-Loading a Sign of a Bad Supplier?

No. It's a cost decision, and from where the supplier sits it's a reasonable one. Pallets take up height and floor space, so a palletised container carries fewer cartons. Wooden pallets for export have to be debarked, treated and marked under ISPM 15, which costs money and needs a certified treatment provider. And under FOB, the price you agreed covers goods delivered on board, not a particular way of loading them. If nobody asked for pallets, the supplier filled the box the cheapest way it could.

What floor-loading can tell you is how much export packing experience a supplier has. A supplier that asks you "floor-loaded or palletised?" before stuffing has done this before. One that's surprised by the question probably hasn't, and you'll want to spell out more of the packing.

2. What Does Floor-Loading Cost Me?

Time and labour at your end, and some risk to the goods.

Unloading. A palletised container comes off with a forklift. A floor-loaded one is unloaded carton by carton. Warehouses charge for that labour, and a US importer in our logs was quoted the labour alone as a separate line (FS-SHP-038). Some warehouses won't take floor-loaded containers at all, or only with notice.

Container time. Slow unloading keeps the box longer. If your free time at destination is tight, a slow unload can push you into detention charges. Ask your forwarder how many free days you have before you book.

Damage. Cartons stacked floor to ceiling carry the full weight of the stack. Weak cartons at the bottom crush, and loose cartons shift at sea. Mixed loads suffer most, with heavy brass crates sitting on cushion covers.

Re-palletising. If your warehouse racks only on pallets, someone has to build pallets after unloading. That's another labour line, and new pallets.

These charges vary by port and warehouse, so get them from your forwarder and warehouse before deciding. We don't quote them.

3. When Is Floor-Loading the Right Choice?

When you value cube over handling. Bulky, light goods that stack well, like rugs, towels, cushions and baskets, fill a box much better without pallets,

and the extra cartons can outweigh the unloading cost. Floor-loading also suits a buyer whose own warehouse has the people to unload by hand and doesn't rack on pallets.

It's a poor choice for heavy goods, fragile goods, mixed loads from several suppliers, and anything going to a 3PL or retail distribution centre that books slots and expects pallets. If you're consolidating several suppliers into one box, pallets per supplier also make the split at destination far easier, see [how to ship from several Indian suppliers in one load](#).

Run the sum both ways. Ask the supplier how many cartons fit floor-loaded and how many palletised, and ask your warehouse what each unload costs.

4. What Should the Purchase Order Say?

Write it down, because a supplier packs to the PO. A loading clause for India covers six points.

1. **Method.** "Palletised, single stacked" or "floor-loaded", stated outright.
2. **Pallet type.** Heat-treated wooden pallets with a legible ISPM 15 mark on two opposite sides, or plastic pallets, or slip sheets if your warehouse has the forklift attachment to pull them. Plastic and processed wood sit outside ISPM 15, but read the [ISPM 15 guide](#) on mixed builds like plywood crates on timber skids.
3. **Pallet size.** The footprint your warehouse racks, written in millimetres. Don't assume the supplier knows the European or North American standard you use.
4. **Height and weight.** A maximum pallet height and weight your racking and forklifts take, and a maximum carton weight if your team unloads by hand.
5. **Wrapping and labels.** Stretch-wrapped, corner boards on fragile loads, and a label on two sides of each pallet with the PO number and carton count.

6. **Proof.** Photos of the empty container, of the pallets showing the ISPM 15 mark, of each stage of stuffing, and of the closed doors with the seal number, sent before the box leaves.

Put the packing in the price talk, not after it. Pallets and treatment are a real cost to the supplier, and asking for them after the price is agreed is how good relationships go sour. Packing and labelling detail for the rest of the order belongs in your RFQ.

5. Who Checks It Before the Box Is Sealed?

Somebody should, because a stuffing problem found at your warehouse is too late to fix. An inspector at loading can check the pallet marks, the stack and the carton count against the packing list, and photograph the seal. Inspection at loading is explained on [pre-shipment inspection in India](#). If you'd rather have a team in India agree the packing spec with the supplier and watch the stuffing, [SourcingSync](#) does that.

Questions Buyers Ask

Do I need ISPM 15 if the goods aren't wood? 

Yes, if the pallets or crates are raw wood. The rule is about the packaging, not the product.

Is a slip sheet a good alternative? 

Will palletising cost more? 

Can I ask for pallets on an FOB order? 

6. Back to "Not One of Their Strengths"

The forum voice had a point, but the floor-loaded box is usually less a failure of skill than a default nobody overrode. Decide what your warehouse needs, write it into the PO, price it in, and ask for the photos.