



Liquid cargoes in flexible tanks – new IUMI guidance

A new position paper from IUMI aims to reduce claims associated with the use of flexible tanks in shipping of liquid cargoes.

Published 13 May 2025

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The International Union of Marine Insurers (IUMI) recently issued a position paper setting out best practices for use of flexible tanks for shipment of liquid cargos. The paper aims to reduce claims associated with this method of shipment.

Growing use of flexitanks

A flexible tank or “flexitank” is a large bladder that is designed to fit inside a 20 ft. multi-modal freight container. Generally constructed of polyethylene, flexitanks are intended for single-use transport of liquids that are not classified as dangerous under the IMDG code. Suitable liquids include food products, wines and oils for human consumption. Latex, hydraulic and lubricating oils and chemicals that do not require declaration under the IMDG code are also shipped in flexitanks.

According to the Container Owners Association (COA), the global use of flexitanks has grown substantially in recent years. COA estimates that more than 1.3 million flexitanks are transported annually. Growth in flexible tanks has outpaced dedicated tank containers due to significantly lower transport costs.

The risks involved

Although not designated as dangerous, many liquid cargos can still be considered pollutants. If a flexitank is punctured, the result is likely total loss of the contents. In addition to loss of the cargo itself, leakage will likely give rise to costs of cleaning the container and vessel, operational areas and public areas as well as potential environmental damage. Additional risks identified by IUMI include bulging/deformation of the container due to improper installation or overloading. Overloading may also compromise the stability of the container within the stow which could lead to loss of the container at sea.

Environmental considerations

Flexitanks are single use plastics. Convenient to use for shippers, the plastic must be handled responsibly both at the manufacture level and after production and use. To facilitate recycling, COA maintains a [recycling facilities list](#).

The IUMI publication: Flexible Tanks for Liquid Bulk Cargo – Recommended Best Practices and Annexes can be downloaded from the [IUMI Position papers page](#). The IUMI Best Practices reference the [COA Code of Practice](#) and the two guidance documents should be read together.