Active Cold Chain Transportation

Active cold chain transport methods broadly refer to any method of transportation that provides supplemental power, mechanical or chemical processes to maintain temperatures while cold chain items are in transit. Active cold chain can come in a variety of forms – the transport method itself could be completely refrigerated, or supply power to self-contained containers that have a cooling effect on the required cargo. Active cold chain equipment can come in many sizes and form factors but is generally better suited for large volumes of temperature regulated health items, or when local regulations require it. Active cold chain transport items can typically be calibrated to a specific set point, which is adjustable based on the transport needs.

Refrigerated Road Vehicles

Refrigerated road vehicles come in a variety of formats, but generally are characterised by:

- Rigid, enclosed structures.
- Active cooling from permanently mounted air conditioner or freezers that draw power either directly from the engine of the vehicle, or specialised independent motors.
- Insulated interior walls/ceiling/floor.
- A tightly closing, sealable door or doors with proper insulated lining.
- An electronically controlled thermostat with an adjustable set point.
- Some refrigerated vehicles have built in alarm systems in case of a temperature excursion.

Refrigerated vehicles cane come in the form of:

- Vans.
- Single unit box trucks.
- Semi-trailers.

The most common type of refrigerated vehicle used in humanitarian contexts is the single unit refrigerated box truck, usually referred to as a “reefer truck”, however this may vary from context to context.

Example refrigerated box truck, with insulated walls and self-contained freezer unit at the highest point of the container.

It is highly unlikely that humanitarian organisations will directly own their own reefer trucks or other refrigerated vehicles unless there is a fully dedicated project that would justify the expense. In the event that the vehicle is owned, humanitarian organisations should refer to the fleet management section of this guide consider all regular requirements associated with maintaining their own trucks.

In the highly likely event that humanitarian organisations contract third-party transport services to utilise a refrigerated road vehicle for transport, they should consider the normal procedures associated with contracting any trucking service. Additionally, there are a few additional contractual terms they should consider when soliciting third party refrigerated vehicles.

Contracting Third Party Refrigerated vehicles:

Recommended Terms - Temperature-Controlled Movements / Requirements

In the case of the movement of temperature-controlled goods, the following terms are recommended for contracting and soliciting third party refrigerated vehicles.

- If required, the contracted trucking company should ensure that the cooling units have been programmed for permanent run prior to loading per instructions.
- Contracted trucking company should ensure a copy of a valid calibration report is present in the truck.
- Contracted trucking company should ensure the driver maintains an activity sheet where temperature readings are recorded at every transition / touch point / stop point.
- Drivers should remain present at the dock area while goods are being loaded at origin and offloaded at destination.
- Drivers should ensure doors are closed immediately after loading. Doors should be barred and locked if required.
- Whenever the trailer doors have to be opened, including but not limited to loading, offloading, they should be closed immediately after-wards to avoid temperature disparities.
- In case of any customs or third-party inspection, the contracted trucking company should inform contracting agency immediately, detailing door opening and closing duration and

the temperature readings should be recorded on the activity sheet.
- The contracted trucking company should provide calibrated and proper functioning reefer equipment and ensure the driver checks the temperature and the reefer equipment's running status at every stop.
- In case of irregularity / temperature variance the contracted trucking company should inform the contracting humanitarian agency immediately.
- The contracted trucking company should make sure the drivers do not remove any temperature monitors / data recorders once they are placed inside the trailer until the truck reaches the point of delivery.
- The contracted trucking company has to ensure temperature monitors / data recorders are to be brought back after delivery.

Temperature Variances / Deviations

- In case of deviations from the terms and conditions contained in this agreement/contract the driver should notify the contracted trucking company, who should communicate this with the contracting humanitarian agency immediately.
- The contracted trucking company should make sure an investigation is done in case of a complaint / temperature variation issue is raised by the contracting humanitarian agency with regards to the temperature variances.
- In any case of claim/complaints the contracted trucking company and contracting humanitarian agency will study the case, should provide the corrective and preventive actions and then proceed with the claim process and procedures.

Maintenance and Calibration

- The contracted trucking company should ensure the reefer system used for transporting temperature-controlled goods should undergo regular preventive maintenance.
- The contracted trucking company should ensure the reefer trucks used are calibrated annually and should be certified.
- Contracted trucking company should provide the contracting humanitarian agency with the records of truck maintenance and calibration certificates upon request.

A general checklist on how to enact road shipments using a refrigerated vehicle can be found below:

Pre-shipment actions:	• Specify temperature requirements. • Prepare shipping documentation and checklists, especially as it pertains to transport of specialty medical items. • Ensure that the designated vehicle is in good working order, that its service record is up-to-date, and that the driver has carried out the relevant daily safety inspection.

Shipping day: actions at point of origin:	• Pack the product in its correct tertiary package and attach temperature-monitoring devices to suit the routing requirements. Keep product under proper storage conditions until the time of dispatch. • Ensure that the vehicle is fully operational, and that the cargo area is clean and odour-free. • Prior to loading, the trailers should be at the temperature required for transport. Loading should only be initiated when the temperature reaches the set point requested by the contracting humanitarian agency. • Keep loading door(s) closed until it is time to load the product. • Ensure that the thermostatic controller on the transport vehicle is set to the required temperature and ensure that the temperature recording device(s) are operating properly. • Check that the vehicle's refrigeration unit is operating properly, and that the temperature has stabilised. Drivers must ensure that the correct temperature setting has been selected. • Load product without delay. Do not overload the vehicle. Allow for air circulation around all sides of the product. Properly block and brace the load, as shown in Annex 1, to avoid shifting during transit. Close door(s) and apply security seal and/or lock if required. • Whenever possible, ensure that the driver is able to supervise the loading process. • If the refrigeration unit has been operating on mains electric power during loading, make sure that the engine-powered refrigeration system is operating correctly, and that the temperature has stabilised within predefined limits before releasing. • Provide clear instructions to the driver concerning the correct load temperature, handling and transport requirements. • Provide emergency contact information to the driver.
Actions during transit:	• Cooling units must remain active throughout the entire journey, including during stops and rest periods. • Energy-saving modes/options of the cooling unit should not be used. • Vehicle payload doors must only be opened during loading and unloading and opening time must be kept to a minimum. • Minimise the time during which the vehicle is unattended by the driver.
Arrival day: actions at destination point(s):	• Ensure priority unloading. • Remove product from the vehicle and move it immediately toa location providing the correct temperature-controlled storage conditions. • Retrieve temperature data from the driver. • (where possible) When the product is received, the consignee should retrieve and deactivate the temperature monitors accompanying the shipment and read and download the data. *Note:* If temperature monitors are not packed with the product, the data from the on-board temperature recording system should be downloaded, or a print-out obtained from the driver and attached to the arrival forms. • Ensure all checklists and arrival forms are completed by the responsible parties.

Adapted from: [WHO - Temperature-controlled transport operations by road and by air]

It is very common for refrigerated vehicles to be opened and undergo inspection when crossing borders, or when operating around intense insecurity. Persons sending items using refrigerated vehicles should anticipate situations when enhanced inspection might happen, and how that might impact transported cargo.

Reefer Containers

A reefer container is a variation on a standard shipping container used in maritime operations, only with the capacity to maintain a constant temperature. Much like refrigerated trucks, reefer containers have self-contained freezer/refrigerator units, and proper insulation. Reefer containers can be transported on the backs of trucks, mounted onto the decks of sea vessels, or even be used as storage facilities.

Reefer containers usually come with both external power connections and self-contained motors used to power refrigeration equipment. As containers are moved, it's the responsibility of the transporter to ensure that the reefer produces constant power and will maintain a temperature to the relevant set-point. Reefer containers can be plugged directly into the electrical systems of large sea vessels, trucks or buildings. Where external power isn't available, reefers – depending on the container – reefers may be able to run an internal motor off of petrol or diesel, however the motors will have to be refuelled and maintained while the items are in transit.

Reefers and Sea Shipping

When reefer containers are utilised for sea shipping, they are almost always owned by either the shipping line, or an intermediary broker. Typically, the use of the reefer container is negotiated using a freight forwarder, and the overall loading and handling of the container is done outside of the control of the organisation or individual sending refrigerated items via ocean. In many cases, owners of refrigerated cargo won't even be involved with stuffing containers.

Example reefer container:

All reefer containers used for sea shipping must undergo what is known as a pre-trip inspection (PTI). Unless the reefer container is owned by the sender of the cargo, PTIs are undertaken by the shipping company. PTIs validate the condition of the container, the refrigeration equipment, and the monitoring equipment, and are rated for 30 to 120 days, depending on the needs of the shipping line and policies of the company.

Humanitarian organisations planning on using reefer containers to transport health supplies should still endeavour to inspect the container wherever possible.

- Even if a PTI is conducted by the transport company, shippers may request their own inspection if necessary, and include them in their own transport contracts.
- It is also advisable that organisations shipping cargo via reefer include the obligation of the shipping line to conduct a PTI in the contract – though the failure to fully conduct a PTI may ultimately be the responsibility of the shipping line, having a written agreement outlining the need for a PTI is still advisable.
- Organisations shipping cargo via reefer may also ask for copies of any monitoring reports that are produced throughout the shipping process. There may even online/real time monitoring capacity available through the transport company.

Reefers as Permanent Storage

Many organisations in humanitarian settings have opted to use reefer containers as permanent storage structures. The use of reefers as storage facilities can be very useful where no other infrastructure is available, however it is still always advisable to investigate permanent hard sided buildings capable of being retrofitted to maintain the required temperature ranges.

If a reefer container is to be kept as a permanent storage structure, there are a few things to consider:

- **Power** - Wherever possible, reefers should be plugged directly into the power grid, or a large enough generator to maintain the power needs of the unit. Though sea shipments might take months to complete, the on-board motor isn't designed for permanent usage. If the on-board motor is used to maintain a reefer's set point, the output exhaust cannot be into an enclosed space, like a larger warehouse.
- **Interior set up** – Though reefers are used for transport, they are not directly designed for storage. This means that the floors of the container might not be conducive to shelving or rolling handling equipment. Additional flooring may need to be installed to accommodate storage needs.
- **Doors** – Reefer containers were designed to be opened infrequently, and using one as a storage facility may lead to excessive heat loss as the large doors may be opened more frequently. Plastic flaps might need to be installed in the interior to reduce heat loss.
- **Temperature monitoring** – Organisations using a reefer as a storage facility will still want to conduct a heat mapping exercise and develop some type of monitoring to ensure that products are still properly maintained.
- **Foundation Placement** - Organisations using reefer containers as storage should ensure that containers are placed on a raised hard surface (usually concrete foundation) or at the very least hard packed soil on raised ground to prevent rain damage.

Air Transport Containers

Use of active cooling containers for the transport of temperature-controlled medical items by air requires some additional preplanning. Where air transport using passive cooling containers entails handing self-contained insulated containers directly to air carriers, active cooling air transport containers provide powered temperature regulation directly in the container itself, either powered by direct connection to the electrical system of the air frame, or through a dedicated battery solution.

There are a variety of active cooling air transport containers, usually specified to conform to different types of aircraft. The range of active cooling air transport containers can be from smaller standalone crates to specifically shaped unit load devices (ULDs) use in common commercial air transport. It is highly unlikely that personnel from a humanitarian aid organisation will ever be involved with loading or handling air transport containers – usually temperature-controlled air transport containers are managed by the ground crew and/or load master, and the equipment itself may only be leased from the manufacturer.

Example temperature-controlled ULD:


RKN60455PC
THERMO KING
Envirotainer°
Charging Unit
AC Input for
Battery Recharge
RKN60455PC
Envirotainer°
Fork lift