

Packing and Shipping Amateur Radio Equipment

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If you are like many others you have experienced or at least heard of the horrors of shipping damage. Armed with a little knowledge that horror can be reduced to a mild nagging as to whether your pride and joy will get there okay. The author has owned a packing and shipping business for seven years and has had much additional packing and shipping experience. At one time we specialized in packing electronic equipment.

It is very important to remember the carriers (UPS, Fedex, Airborne, Post Office and others) set their own rules. If we ship amateur radio equipment (or anything for that matter) we must abide by their rules when we ship and when we deal with them on a damage claim. We may not like it but if we are going to ship these are the facts. We need to learn their rules and play accordingly or we will be living a horror story sooner or later.

Obviously, your first goal is to assure your amateur radio equipment is undamaged in transit. A very close second is to assure that if your equipment is damaged you receive a fair settlement. Adequate packing (cushioning) materials serves these two afore mentioned purposes. Once a damaged item is declared to have "inadequate cushioning" the damage claim is denied and the odds of getting that reversed are almost zero. And, this is regardless of the amount of insurance you purchased. Complying with the carriers expectations for adequate cushioning of your specific item is the only way to convince them the package was damaged only due to their actions and not the use of inadequate cushioning

Insurance in no way guarantees you will receive any payment or other compensation such as repair. In order to collect you must pack the item to the extent expected by the carrier and should the item be damaged then be able to prove to the carriers satisfaction the value of the item. They will only deal with the depreciated value of the item and not the replacement cost or cost when new. More expensive items get more rigorous scrutiny for value and documentation of that value.

Photos, weight and size information may assist with a claim settlement. Take pictures during each stage of your packing process. Be sure the type materials used is clearly visible. Include pictures of the finished package. Record weights and dimensions. These may be available on your shipping receipt. Should there be a claim offer this information including copies of the photos to the carrier claims or insurance department to assure the correct item and all it's packing materials were evaluated.

Use extreme caution during packing and handling. Obviously, you don't want to drop or otherwise damage your pride and joy. Use box knives with great care. Sharp tools help prevent accidents. Not so obvious are the hazards of paper and corrugated (cardboard) cuts. A cut from corrugated can be much more severe than a paper cut. Know the location of your first aid kit.

The type of packing material and thickness and the type of box(s) are your main concern when packing that boat anchor or brand new rig going in for warranty repair. The type, amount and quality of the material should be appropriate for the value, weight and fragility and destination of the item. When packing, start inside with the item to be packed and work to the outside of the package. This assures you adequately protect the item, the right size box is selected and it is properly sealed.

Minimum cushioning in all circumstances for boxed items should be at least one inch thick. Extremely fragile, valuable and heavy items traveling long distances by ground may require double boxing or crating and as much as six or more inches of cushioning. Cushioning materials are available in several varieties. Not all are suitable for all items. In all instances over stuff the container. Settling occurs in shipment. Use caution to avoid damaging antenna connectors, controls and other protruding objects.

Items such as spools of wire and heavy mast may be shipped without cushioning or an external container. Be aware they are more prone to damage outside a container and may be judged as insufficient cushioning if damaged. Items outside a corrugated container are charged an extra handling fee by most carriers.

Newsprint can be used for smaller non-fragile items that are lighter weight. This includes cable, hardware, wire and similar items up to about 10 pounds depending on size. Shredded newsprint mats down (compresses) during shipment and offers little protection in this state. The best newsprint is glossy advertising circulars. Crumple each sheet into about a two inch ball. If you are using full sheets of newsprint tear them in half before crumpling. Pack them tightly around the item. As a minimum put a corrugated liner in the bottom and top of the container and preferably on all sides.

Packing peanuts are available in two basic types. Peanuts made from synthetic materials are the most popular, but can build and hold a static charge and are not biodegradable. Obviously, static electricity can damage your top of the line Yaesu or Icom. Biodegradable peanuts are made from corn starch but are about fifty percent more expensive. Packing peanuts are popular but actually offer very little actual cushioning protection. They easily compress and settle about ten percent during shipment. Items packed in peanuts tend to shift inside the container during transit. This increases the odds of damage. Peanuts should be used for void (empty space) fill only. Instances would be when you have finished packing and have small voids in the container corners or other location. Peanuts will help keep the corners from crushing in during normal handling.

Bubble wrap is available in several sizes. The most popular are 3/16" and 1/2" bubble size. The smaller size should be used for items like books, wire antennas, junk box parts and like items depending on weight. The larger size bubble is used for transceivers, receivers, transmitters, tuners and other more fragile items. Fragile items are best described as items with circuit boards, vacuum tubes or meters. Smaller and less valuable items may only require as little as two inches of larger bubble wrap. That is about 3-4 layers of 1/2" bubble. Larger, more heavy and valuable items need four inches (5-6 layers). Top of the line items will need five to six inches (7-8 layers).

Generally, it is best to leave vacuum tubes in the equipment provided their sockets hold them securely and they are cushioned inside the item. Open the amplifier, boat anchor or other equipment and pack bubble wrap or polystyrene strips around the tubes and fill the void inside with additional cushioning that is dust free and non-static producing. This helps assure the tubes stay in place and keeps them and other internal items from damage. Always write a note about the internal cushioning and place it conspicuously inside the package so the recipient will understand to unpack the inside before applying power.

There are other cushioning materials available depending again on the item to be packed. Foam-in-place, commercially prepared foam bags and polystyrene boards are examples. These are beyond the ability of most people to procure and use. If you think you need these contact a commercial establishment that specializes in these products. Do not use spray insulating foam

found in hardware stores. It is worthless for packing purposes and most likely will result in a damaged item and will earn you an inadequate cushioning award from your carrier.

Boxes vary in size, capacity, color and styles. There are national standards established for boxes. Using an inadequate box can lead to your financial loss. Used boxes for lighter and non-fragile items is most likely acceptable. However, for all other items a new box is preferred. Used boxes may have lost up to 80 percent of their strength. Carrier claims inspectors most likely will deny a claim for a fragile or more valuable item if it is shipped in a used box except as explained below for double and triple boxing. They can easily determine the difference between a first time use box and one that has been reused.

Boxes have weight ratings that must be strictly observed. Single wall boxes are typically rated for 35, 65, 90 pounds. Double wall ratings are typically 105 and 120 pounds. Do not exceed the rating of the box. Do not pack a 70 pound amplifier in a 65 pound box and expect a damage claim to be paid. Ratings are included in the box manufacturers stamp on the bottom of the box. Assure this stamp is always on the bottom side of your finished package. Always adhere labels on the opposite side. Carriers consider the shipping label as the top of the box.

More fragile and heavier items should be double boxed. Triple boxing may be needed for more fragile, larger, heavier or more valuable items. The use of double wall boxes may substitute for triple boxing but not double boxing. Evenly divide the cushioning thickness around the item and the outside of the inner box(s) whether double or triple boxing.

Some amateur radio equipment is received from the manufacturer in a box that is suitable as an inner box. Usually the cushioning inside this box is adequate for inner cushioning when double or triple boxing. When this inner cushioning material is used subtract its thickness from that discussed above to determine the additional cushioning required. Do not ship the item via a commercial carrier using only the box you received it in. These boxes are palletized and handled as a unit when shipped to your local amateur radio dealer. They are not designed to withstand the rigors of being shipped as individual boxes. It has been reliably estimated the average package is handled 38 times when shipped by a commercial carrier.

Tape should be acrylic or rubber based. Filament tape should be used to add strength to larger and heavier packages. Do not use cellophane, plastic, duct, masking or electrical tape. Rope, twine and string are prohibited. There is no substitute for quality tape. The use of 3 mil thickness is recommended. After wrapping the item or inner box use tape to hold the cushioning in place....4-6" long stripes every 6-8" at the edges and ends of the bubble wrap. Mark the item and its cushioning so the top is obvious. When closing a box place at least three strips on the top and bottom at the line the two flaps make when closed. This should be the full length of the box, around the edge and 4-6" on the adjoining sides. Place a strip along the side edge of the flaps to join the flaps and box sides. Every 4-6" place additional 4-6" strips across the tape just applied. Assure the bottom is adequately taped as well as the top.

Items valued over two or three thousand dollars, heavy items (over 50-60 pounds) and larger items (>20"x20"x20") most likely needs specialized preparation and should be prepared by a professional service. These items may need specialized foam packing, crating or the expertise of a professional.

There are several sources of cushioning materials to include boxes and tape. Office supply stores carry a variety of suitable items. Armed with the information in the article you should be able to make wise choices in these stores. Professional pack and ship businesses offer a variety of

materials as well. Call around and shop carefully as these stores offer varying items at varying prices. You will find some of these stores more knowledgeable than others. eBay auctions may also be a viable alternative to locate materials. Should you need specialized assistance check the Yellow Pages under "Packaging Service" or "Packing & Crating Services" and get two or more written estimates. Boxes and other packing materials gleaned from the back dock of supermarkets and other locations is actually worth about the amount you paid for it.

To conclude, the best way to assure your valuable rig, boat anchor or other amateur radio equipment survives the rigors of shipment is to pack your pride and joy as expected by the carrier. It surely is your pride and joy but to those handling it the box is one of hundreds or thousands they will handle each day. No one box regardless of markings or value to you is singled out for different handling from any other box. Protect your radio equipment well to prevent damage and to assure a fair claim settlement should it be damaged. Should you need more information you may contact the author at (719)-641-8477. At this time we are not in the business to sell packing materials or shipping services. But, we will be happy to offer you free advice and it probably be worth its price.