

ISPM 15 Wood Packaging FAQ

Understanding the ISPM 15 regulation and how it applies to your particular situation can be confusing. We have compiled a list of commonly asked questions to help you better understand the regulation, the IPPC mark and the approval process for ISPM 15 wood packaging. If you have a question that is not on our list or if you want to learn more about becoming an approved ISPM 15 wood packaging facility, please call (954) 946-2212 one of our expert staff will be happy to assist you.

FAQ Questions

Q: What is ISPM 15?

A: ISPM 15, is the acronym for International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures #15. It was created by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), a part of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization. The standard addresses the need to have all wood packaging made of softwood or hardwood species treated. It requires packaging that has been treated to carry a special mark to certify it as such. The treatment could be for each individual piece or the completed packaging and the method of treatment could be either via heat treatment (HT) or fumigation.

Q: Why is ISPM 15 required?

A: Untreated lumber poses a risk of carrying harmful plant pests. This standard was developed to reduce the risk of transferring those pests across international borders. Every locale likely has some pest(s) that are native to that locale, but which could be extremely harmful to local plants in a different region. For example, America and Canada have a microscopic pest, called the Pinewood Nematode that is hazardous to the trees of other continents. China has the Asian Longhorn Beetle that is hazardous to native trees in the United States and Canada. ISPM 15 attempts to limit or reduce the chances of such pests harming native flora and fauna. Since wood packaging (boxes, pallets, crates, dunnage, etc.) is typically made from the lowest grade of lumber, the instances of pests is often higher due to the presence of bark.

Q: What happens when wood packaging does not comply, and it is shipped anyway?

A: Each country is different. Some countries will fumigate the package (contents and all) and charge the shipper at a premium rate. Some will just deny the shipment. There have even been cases of the shipment being incinerated or buried in a landfill. Still others may re-export only the packaging and charge a premium rate for replacing the non-compliant material.

Q: Can I simply buy ISPM 15 certified wood and use that to build my pallet/box/crate?

A: ISPM 15 certification is a quality control program specifically for solid wood packaging material, it does not apply to raw lumber. As such, there is no such thing as "ISPM 15 certified wood." As a quality control program, the IPPC certification mark is often licensed to registered wood packaging producers. These registered facilities

apply the IPPC mark to the finished pallets, crates, boxes, etc. While it may be possible to build a pallet/box/crate from lumber that has the original HT mark visible on each piece, this often is not practical. The IPPC mark certifies the entire wood packaging item and not just one piece of solid wood. It is important to think of the customs officials, as well. Being forced to look at every board in a wood packaging item would be an overly cumbersome and time-consuming process.

Q: How do I show that the wood packaging I produce is ISPM 15 compliant?

A: The IPPC mark shown below is applied to the wood packaging. This mark is commonly applied as an ink stamp, stencil or brand on a clearly visible exterior surface of the packaging. The IPPC mark is applied to a minimum of two opposite sides and certifies that all solid wood has met the heat treatment requirement.

Q: I have IPPC marked wood packaging from another manufacturer, can I repair/reuse it, or build onto it?

A: You can reuse certified wood packaging so long as you do not alter it by removing and replacing any existing components. Should you need to repair it, it will need to be retreated. Re-treatment can be done by either a certified kiln facility or certified fumigator. However, you are permitted to build on to existing wood packaging that has already been certified, assuming the existing portion of the container is not altered, and the added material is certified as having been heat treated. An example of this scenario would be building a frame using HT lumber on top of an already certified pallet. In this case the manufacturer would place their IPPC stamp only on the frame that they added to the pallet.

Q: The country I am shipping to requires all wood to be bark-free, what does this mean?

A: Bark-free wood is defined as wood from which all bark excluding the vascular cambium, ingrown bark around knots, and bark pockets between rings of annual growth has been removed. [ISPM No. 15, 2002] Based on this definition bark found in the wane area would not be acceptable and would need to be removed prior to shipment. A list of countries that currently require wood packaging to be bark-free can be found in the ISPM 15 country list.

Q: Can I use a phytosanitary certificate to certify my product as ISPM 15 compliant?

A: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) will not issue phytosanitary certificates for wood packaging when the wood packaging is not itself the commodity being shipped. This is because there are already certification procedures in place which require application of the IPPC mark to show compliance to ISPM 15.