

Self Clearing International Shipments into Canada

The following instruction details how to self clear shipments into Canada through the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), in order to avoid the fees that the couriers levy for this service. Clearing a shipment with CBSA is essentially the same with each carrier, but each carrier has different policies for administering fees and releasing shipments. For guidance, I have documented my experience with each carrier that I have used.

Your agreement with a carrier consists of transporting a shipment to you, and it does not include an agreement for the carrier to clear your shipment into Canada. Upon delivery of a shipment to the destination city, service from the carrier can be terminated without additional charges if you clear the shipment into Canada, and present the carrier with the required documentation (B-15 form). Note that the carrier will prepare papers and generate fees for this additional service in the event that you do not self clear the shipment.

It is your right to self clear a shipment into Canada, and upon doing so, you will receive a B-15 form from the CBSA office for your records. Presenting this form to the carrier allows the agent to release the shipment without any additional charges. If you do not self clear a shipment, you accept the carrier's brokerage service and the associated fees.

A cautionary note: It is recommended that you consult a CBSA agent for any questions regarding self clearing, rather than the carrier. The carriers' agents will give misinformation about self clearing in order to collect their fee.

You will need three documents to self clear a shipment:

- 1) Receipt; Print the paypal screen, the receipt emailed to you, or anything that shows what you paid for the shipment. If the total is not shown in Canadian funds, CBSA will convert it to Canadian funds for the GST calculation.
- 2) *UPS and FedEx:* Copy of the commercial invoice; obtained by phoning the courier and asking for it to be emailed to you. Unlike the address label, it also lists the package contents, the value, and the waybill number. A copy of the commercial invoice is always attached to the shipment.
DHL: stop by the depot on your way to CBSA, and inform them that you will self clear the parcel. Using their cargo manifest, they will generate a form for you to take to the CBSA. I used the commercial invoice last time, but CBSA now asks that you do this with DHL only.
- 3) Door knocker, or proof that the shipment is in Calgary. CBSA has to be able to inspect the shipment if they choose, so they may ask you where the shipment is. The easiest way is to have the door knocker from the courier which contains the waybill number which matches the commercial invoice.

Upon presenting these (3) documents to the CBSA agent, you will be asked about the contents of the shipment in order for the agent to categorize the shipment, then you will be given a B-15 form to take to the cashier kiosk for payment of the GST (they don't like cash, so bring a credit or debit card to use). Upon returning the B-15 form to the CBSA agent, the agent will validate the form with a stamp, thereby clearing your shipment into Canada.

General notes:

- 1) The carrier's agent will take your B-15 form. It is advisable to ask them to copy it, and keep this copy for your records until you are satisfied that you won't receive a bill in the mail (see UPS- "When customs waybills a shipment" and also Fedex Ground instructions). Upon receiving a bill, a phone call and emailing them a scan of the B-15 form has always resolved this.
- 2) It is good practice to clear and pick up a shipment as soon as it is available for pickup, to minimize handling/ damage at the depot.

UPS: When the shipment is clearing customs at the port of entry, you may receive an automated phone call asking you to pre-pay a sum of money to expedite delivery if no signature is required at delivery. You can ignore this call because it is not possible to clear the shipment until it reaches Calgary, and it is UPS' policy to make one delivery attempt. Based on the fees due, if you want to self clear the shipment, ask the delivery driver to return the shipment to the depot and you'll go and pick it up. The driver will generate a "door knocker" for you. Call the phone number on the door knocker and ask the agent to:

- a) Hold the shipment for pickup
- b) Email you a copy of the commercial invoice.

Your shipment will be removed from the truck that night and it will be available for pickup on the next business day.

- Before going to the CBSA office, it is a good idea to call and confirm that UPS has your shipment at the depot. Occasionally the loaders miss removing the shipment from the truck, which will necessitate a second trip.
- After clearing your shipment with CBSA, present the B-15 form to the carrier, and your shipment will be released to you without any additional charge.

When customs 'Waybills' a shipment, it means that customs inspected the shipment at the point of entry, and UPS will have paid the GST at that time. You will receive a bill in the mail from UPS for the GST plus brokerage fees, but only the GST is payable to UPS, and it will have to be refunded to you by CBSA. .

- Call the agent and confirm that the shipment has been waybilled
(Note: you can also ask them this when you initially call to ask for the commercial invoice, but a call back to UPS after the parcel is cleared and released is required in order to pay the GST and ask for the refund forms.)
- If the response is "yes", tell them that you self cleared the shipment and obtained the B-15 form from CBSA.

- If necessary, email the UPS agent the B-15 form, agree to pay them the GST requested, and ask them to mail you the refund forms. Confirm that all other charges will be dropped.
- After UPS receives the GST payment, they will mail you the pre-completed refund form with a copy of the commercial invoice and the B-15 form attached. You need to sign, date, and mail the form to the CBSA office for a refund.
- In 3-4 weeks you should receive your GST refund cheque from CBSA.

Fed-Ex_Air costs more than ground service, but they claim that brokerage is included in the price. This has usually been the case, and they will only charge GST on a shipment. Once, however, they classified a shipment valued at over \$2000 as a “high value shipment”, and company policy dictated that they prepare special brokerage papers. In this case, they called to ask if I wanted to use them as my clearing agent, and they misinformed me that I could not self clear a shipment worth over \$2000. According to CBSA, there is no limit on the dollar value of a shipment that you can self clear. If FedEx does not allow you to clear the shipment, let them clear it, and at delivery, ask the driver to return the shipment to the depot for you to pick up. Follow the same procedure to clear it as with UPS.

Fed-Ex Ground never asks for money when releasing a shipment. Instead they will mail you a bill for fees associated with brokerage and GST, which takes 3-4 weeks to arrive. The easiest way to prepare yourself for the bill, is to accept your shipment or pick it up if you miss the delivery, and use the commercial invoice affixed to the shipment (inside the plastic envelope) and your receipt to self clear it. Take the shipment with you if possible, and if the CBSA agent asks where the shipment is, you can tell them that it was delivered to you, but that you do not want to pay the brokerage fees to FedEx. They will clear the shipment for you.

When you receive the bill from FedEx call the FedEx trade network at 1-866-463-8682 and;

- 1) Upon giving the agent your waybill number, tell them that you self cleared the shipment, and that you have the B-15 form.
- 2) Confirm with the operator if the GST was paid, and if so, tell them that you will email them a scan of the B-15 form as well as mail them a cheque for the GST. You will have to pay the GST a second time and request a refund yourself because FedEx cannot request refunds on your shipment.
- 3) Ask that FedEx send you the pre-completed B2G refund form for you to sign and date, before mailing it to the CBSA Refund center. I emailed the B-15 form to FedEx right after the phone call, and they responded to my email that same day with the refund form.
- 4) Mail the GST cheque to FedEx.

- 5) Print, sign, and date the refund form, attach the B-15 and commercial invoice, and mail the refund request to the CBSA office. Make sure to keep copies of the commercial invoice and the B-15.

DHL may call and ask for pre-payment of the fees as the shipment is clearing customs. Unlike UPS, you *can* get them to hold the shipment for pickup before it goes out for delivery. Follow the phone message instruction to do this online, or follow the instructions on the door knocker, and you will receive an email when the shipment is ready for pickup. Printing that email is the same as having a door knocker. As mentioned, stop by the depot on your way to the CBSA office to tell them that you will self clear your shipment, and they will print you a form to present to the CBSA agent to clear your shipment. Upon returning to DHL with the CBSA form, they will release your shipment without further charge.