



Some people just don't get it.

For many months now, I have been writing about the need to make sure that the items customers are packing in their balikbayan boxes are not those prohibited by both the United States' Department of Homeland Security and the Philippines' Bureau of Customs.

The Pilipino American Shippers Association (PASA) likewise has been undertaking a campaign to educate the customers on what may and may not be included in the boxes to be shipped to the Philippines.

News articles have also come out in both Philippine newspapers and Filipino-American publications about unscrupulous cargo companies and balikbayan box customers being charged with various violations after searches showed weapons, ammunition, illegal drugs and

other prohibited items in some balikbayan boxes.

And yet, some people continue to include prohibited items and commercial cargo in their boxes or containers, risking possible arrest and conviction.

DHS random inspection will reveal the existence of any suspicious-looking items spotted in an X-ray examination.

DHS inspectors will seize the container and open all the boxes inside one by one.

The suspicious-looking items will be confirmed and will be seized and the sender will ultimately be charged with violation of U.S. laws.

The problem is that the resulting physical inspection caused at least a two-week delay in the shipment of the boxes contained in the infected container.

Worse, the boxes were opened and all their items removed and inspected before being returned to the boxes.

In addition, the cargo company, who took all precautions and reminded all its customers to check for prohibited items, was disrupted by numerous investigations by DHS agents.

By insisting on putting prohibited items in balikbayan boxes, the sender does not only risk being arrested and prosecuted either in the U.S. or in the Philippines, but he also causes delays in the delivery of the boxes of other customers.

The delays then cause a major dent on the image of both the cargo forwarders and the entire balikbayan box industry.

Firearms are just some of prohibited items that in very few instances are found concealed in supposedly personnel effects and household goods that overseas Filipinos send to their loved ones in the Philippines.

Although such illegal practices are rare, it is important to note that Customs authorities in the Philippines are always on the lookout for prohibited items that may have been intentionally or innocently placed inside balikbayan boxes.

We have already enumerated in a recent article the items prohibited by U.S. laws.

For the information of balikbayan box senders, these are the commodities that are not allowed for importation under existing Philippine laws:

- Dynamite, gunpowder, ammunition and other explosives, firearms and weapons of war, and parts thereof, except when authorized by law;
  
- Written or printed articles in any form containing any matter advocating or inciting treason, or rebellion, insurrection, sedition or subversion against the government of the Philippines, or forcible resistance to any law of the Philippines;
  
- Written or printed articles, negatives or cinematographic film, photographs, engravings, lithographs, objects, paintings, drawings or other representation of an obscene or immoral character;
  
- Articles, instruments, drugs, substances designed, intended or adapted for producing unlawful abortion, or any printed matter which advertises or describes or gives directly or indirectly information regarding where, how or by whom unlawful abortion is produced;

## Customers must be aware of what are banned items

Friday, 30 September 2011 13:19

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- Roulette wheels, gambling outfits, loaded dice, marked cards, machines, apparatus or mechanical devices used in gambling;
- Lottery and sweepstakes tickets except those authorized by the Philippine Government, advertisement thereof, and lists of drawings therein;
- Any article manufactured in whole or in part of gold, silver or other precious metals or alloys thereof;
- Any adulterated or misbranded articles of food or drug;
- Marijuana, opium or any other narcotics or synthetic drugs;
- Opium pipes and parts thereof, of whatever material; and
- All other articles or part thereof, the importation of which is prohibited by law or rules and regulation issued by competent authority (as amended by Presidential Decree no. 34).

You must remember that the balikbayan boxes are only meant to contain personnel effects and household goods for the personal use of the recipients, and not for the purpose of reselling the items in the Philippines.

The bills of lading for balikbayan boxes clearly state that the boxes contain “personnel effects,” and are thus exempt from the usual customs duties and other taxes.

Some unscrupulous senders, sometimes with the knowledge of equally unscrupulous balikbayan box forwarders, try to subvert Philippine customs and import laws by concealing prohibited items, such as guns and drugs, and commercial quantities of goods in balikbayan

boxes.

Filipino cargo forwarders are aware of these problems, and are working with the DHS and Philippine Customs authorities to prevent unscrupulous people from using the industry for their nefarious activities.

Forwarders are now requiring senders to produce government-issued photo identification cards before they can accept balikbayan boxes from them.

This should serve as a deterrent to smugglers and other unscrupulous individuals from sending illegal items, knowing that they can be identified and caught.

Employees of cargo companies should properly enforce this ID rule so that authorities can easily trace the culprits.

Forwarders will also start requiring the senders to declare the items in the box by filling up a packing list included in invoices or bill of lading.

Packing list must be provided for each individual box sent.

The Filipino shippers have pledged to police their own ranks to prevent unscrupulous businessmen from using the industry as a conduit for smuggling and other illegal activities.

It is important that forwarders put up a united front against these illegal activities to maintain the integrity and credibility of the balikbayan box industry.

However, the role of the sender in helping the industry better serve them cannot be under-emphasized.

It is important that senders be aware of prohibitions in the contents of the boxes that they are sending to the Philippines.

If the unscrupulous practices of some senders and some cargo forwarders are not checked, there will come a time when it will become extremely difficult to send those precious balikbayan boxes to our loved ones in the Philippines.

*Sana magtulungan tayo para mapanatili natin ang integridad ng balikbayan box.*

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