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Missing, surplus and damaged air cargo

What happens when the count does not match or cargo arrives damaged; how are missing and found cargo reported, and how long does the consignee have to complain to the carrier?

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Online interactive version: **https://ozgurkonakci.com/en/guide/air-cargo-discrepancies-damage/**

SHORT ANSWER

In air cargo, a shipment's status and discrepancy details can be sent in the (X)FSU message; the DIS status reports an apparent error in handling or documentation at that station. In IATA's code lists, MSCA used with DIS means missing cargo and FDCA means found cargo. Under Article 31 of the Montreal Convention, for damage the consignee must complain to the carrier in writing at the latest within 14 days from receipt of the cargo, and for delay within 21 days from the date the cargo was placed at their disposal. Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, when cargo was missing we sent messages to the departure and transfer airports and followed them up, and when cargo was damaged we carried out a damage inspection.

A short note first

This page gives a general account of what happens on arrival when an air cargo count does not match or cargo arrives damaged; it does not name airlines. Sentences marked “between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal” or “the practice at the time” describe the author's experience in those years, not today's rules. Today's codes and rules are given separately from IATA sources and the text of the Montreal Convention. The claim file and carrier liability limits are not repeated here; links to the relevant topics are given instead. Sources are listed at the end of the page.

Missing, surplus, damaged: the steps

Counting arriving cargo, the summary declaration and handover to customs are covered in **Air cargo arrival: from aircraft to customs declaration**. This page covers what happens when the count does not match or cargo arrives damaged: how missing and found cargo are reported, following up missing cargo, damaged cargo, and the consignee's deadline for complaining to the carrier.

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, we counted the cargo arriving from passenger and cargo aircraft at the airline's cargo department, inspected it for damage and handed it over to the customs officers. In that work, these situations could come up:

1. **Missing cargo:** When cargo was missing, messages were sent to the departure and transfer airports and followed up.
2. **Damaged cargo:** When we came across damaged cargo, a damage inspection was carried out.
3. **Paperwork and signatures:** We filled in the necessary paperwork for this process and had the officers sign it.
4. **Handover after counting:** Sometimes the goods were counted first and then handed over to customs.

This list describes the practice at the time. Today's codes and rules are given below with their sources.

When the count does not match: the DIS status

Today a shipment's status and discrepancy details can be sent electronically in the **(X)FSU** message. According to IATA's ONE Record XFSU mapping page, the XFSU message is used to provide a shipment status update, discrepancy details or sometimes complementary customs information. FSU and XFSU are shipment-level messages; their entry point is the AWB number.

One of the status codes in this message is **DIS**. DIS reports that an apparent error has occurred, on that date at that location, in the handling of the consignment or its documentation; the type of error is clarified by the discrepancy code that accompanies DIS.

We give these codes from today's IATA sources; this page does not describe the format of the messages we sent to airports between 1998 and 2000.

MSCA and FDCA: missing and found cargo

In IATA's ONE Record code lists (2026-07 standard), two of the discrepancy codes used with DIS are:

- **MSCA** (missing cargo).
- **FDCA** (found cargo).

The same list has other discrepancy codes too, for example OFLD (offloaded), OVCD (overcarried) and SSPD (shortshipped).

The sources speak of “found cargo”, not “surplus cargo”. According to the e-AWB standard operating procedure IATA published for Mauritius Airport, cargo arriving without any document, any electronic data or any mention on the flight manifest is reported as FDCA (found cargo). The same sentence appears in some of the e-AWB procedures IATA has published for other airports. These procedures are for those airports; for the flow at your airport, ask the airline or the ground handling agent.

Following up missing cargo

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, when cargo was missing we sent messages to the departure and transfer airports and followed them up. This was the practice at the time.

For how missing cargo is traced today, ask the airline or the ground handling agent.

Section 2.3 of IATA's Mauritius e-AWB procedure covers a different situation: not missing cargo, but missing *electronic data* for a shipment. Under that procedure, if a shipment's electronic data is missing when the aircraft lands, the ground handling agent or carrier initiates tracing through the agreed procedure, requests the AWB data from the origin station and informs the consignee of the irregularity. These steps are for missing data; they should not be read as a procedure for missing cargo.

Damaged cargo

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, when we came across damaged cargo we carried out a damage inspection. We filled in the necessary paperwork for the counting, damage inspection and handover to customs, and had the officers sign it. This too was the practice at the time.

Ask the airline or the ground handling agent which form is used today to record damage.

What the consignee should do at delivery is covered in the The first 24 hours at delivery section, and what goes into a claim file in the What goes into a claim file? section.

For the consignee: Article 31 of the Montreal Convention

Where the Montreal Convention applies, the consignee's deadlines for complaining to the carrier are in Article 31 of the Convention:

- **Damage:** The person entitled to delivery must complain to the carrier forthwith after discovering the damage and at the latest within 14 days from the date of receipt of the cargo.
- **Delay:** The complaint must be made at the latest within 21 days from the date on which the cargo was placed at that person's disposal.
- **Form:** Every complaint must be in writing. If no complaint is made in time, no action lies against the carrier, save in the case of fraud on its part.

Under the same article, receipt of cargo without complaint is prima facie evidence that it was delivered in good condition and in accordance with the document of carriage.

We take the text of the Convention from its official reproduction in UK legislation (Carriage by Air Act 1961, Schedule 1B). Notice periods and time bars in other transport modes are covered in the Notice periods and time bars section, and the carrier's liability limit and cargo insurance in **Carrier liability and cargo insurance**.

Test yourself

1. What do the MSCA and FDCA codes used with the DIS status mean? *(Answer: MSCA means missing cargo, FDCA means found cargo.)*
2. Under Article 31 of the Montreal Convention, what are the complaint deadlines for damage and for delay? *(Answer: For damage, at the latest 14 days from receipt of the cargo; for delay, 21 days from the date the cargo was placed at the consignee's disposal; the complaint must be in writing.)*
3. Which situation are the tracing steps in IATA's Mauritius e-AWB procedure for? *(Answer: For missing electronic data for a shipment; not for missing cargo.)*

Frequently asked questions

What do MSCA and FDCA mean?

They are discrepancy codes used with the DIS status in IATA's ONE Record code lists (2026-07 standard): MSCA means missing cargo and FDCA means found cargo. DIS reports that an apparent error has occurred at that date and location in the handling of the consignment or its documentation.

How is cargo reported that arrives without documents or a manifest entry?

According to the e-AWB standard operating procedure IATA published for Mauritius Airport, cargo arriving without any document, any electronic data or any mention on the flight manifest is reported as FDCA (found cargo). That procedure is for that airport.

How long does the consignee have to complain to the carrier about damage or delay in air cargo?

Under Article 31 of the Montreal Convention, for damage the person entitled to delivery must complain to the carrier forthwith after discovering it and at the latest within 14 days from receipt of the cargo; for delay, at the latest within 21 days from the date the cargo was placed at their disposal. The complaint must be in writing; if no complaint is made in time, no action lies against the carrier, save in the case of fraud on its part.

What does receiving cargo without complaint mean?

Under Article 31 of the Montreal Convention, receipt of cargo without complaint is prima facie evidence that it was delivered in good condition and in accordance with the document of carriage.

SOURCES

IATA — XFSU Mapping, ONE Record Specification — https://iata-cargo.github.io/ONE-Record/development/Orchestration/xfsu/
IATA — ONE Record Code Lists Ontology, 2026-07 standard (DIS discrepancy codes) — https://github.com/IATA-Cargo/ONE-Record/blob/master/2026-07-standard/Data-Model/IATA-1R-CL-Ontology.ttl
IATA — e-AWB standard operating procedure for Mauritius (MRU) Airport — https://www.iata.org/contentassets/b559d10aeb734d5196332b4953dcf312/e-awb-sop-mru.pdf
legislation.gov.uk (The National Archives, UK) — Carriage by Air Act 1961, Schedule 1B: text of the Montreal Convention, Article 31 — https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/9-10/27/schedule/1B

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