



Singapore Import Permits: Set Up the First Shipment Correctly

Description

Before a first commercial import, obtain a UEN, activate the Customs Account and decide whether to appoint a declaring agent or use TradeNet directly. Classify the goods and secure the required import permit before relying on an arrival date.

A Singapore SME preparing its first commercial import shipment faces a narrower question than the headline suggests: complete the importer, permit, classification and tax sequence before cargo is shipped or cleared. The table separates the branches that change the answer before the practical checks and worked example.

Choose the branch before acting

Situation	Practical next step
Occasional first shipment	A competent declaring agent may be simpler, but the importer remains accountable
Regular in-house declarations	Assess TradeNet access, staffing and controls
Controlled goods	Obtain the competent authority's approval before the Customs permit
Dutiable goods	Budget duty as well as import GST and handling costs

Create the importer identity first

Singapore Customs sets out a UEN and activated Customs Account as the starting point for import activity. The entity details must match the commercial invoice, freight instructions and permit application; inconsistent names create avoidable clearance problems. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

The importer can appoint a declaring agent or make declarations through TradeNet. Outsourcing does not transfer legal responsibility for truthful classification, value, origin or licence information, so review the draft permit before submission. [Singapore Customs import-permit guide](#).

Classify the goods before quoting landed cost

Identify the Harmonised System code, customs value, country of origin and whether the goods are controlled. Product descriptions such as “parts” or “samples” are too vague to support a reliable classification or permit. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Singapore generally imposes import GST, while liquor, tobacco, motor vehicles and petroleum products are among dutiable categories. Product-specific reliefs and schemes require their own conditions; do not assume a low-value or sample label eliminates tax. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Sequence licences and permits

For controlled goods, obtain the relevant agency approval before or as required for the TradeNet declaration. A supplier’s export permission is not a Singapore import authorisation, and a freight booking is not a Customs permit. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Send the approved permit number and conditions to the forwarder before arrival. Where a permit is conditional, make sure the warehouse, inspection or end-use arrangement can actually comply rather than treating approval as a generic green light. [Singapore Customs import-permit guide](#).

Reconcile the shipment after clearance

Keep the commercial invoice, packing list, transport document, permit, classification basis and tax payment in one consignment file. Compare the cleared quantities and values with inventory and accounts as soon as the goods arrive. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

If the shipment changes in transit, tell the declaring agent before using an inaccurate permit. A correction made early is preferable to an audit trail where the physical goods never matched the declaration. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Put the numbers or sequence to work

An SME imports S\$20,000 of equipment. A 9% GST estimate is S\$1,800 before freight, insurance, valuation adjustments or any duty; this is only a planning calculation. The company confirms the HS code and control status, reviews the declaring agent’s draft, obtains the permit and gives it to the forwarder before the cargo reaches Singapore.

The example is a planning model, not a quoted price, official calculator result, medical instruction or promised outcome. Replace its assumptions with the issued notice, live service, signed contract, current timetable or professional advice that controls the real decision.

Before you commit

1. Obtain the UEN and activate the Customs Account
2. Choose declaring-agent or TradeNet responsibility
3. Confirm HS code, origin and customs value
4. Check controlled and dutiable status
5. Secure agency approval where needed
6. Approve the permit before arrival
7. Reconcile documents, goods and tax after clearance

A useful working note combines a **seven-step first-shipment dependency chain** with a **worked S\$1,800 import-GST cash-flow estimate with explicit exclusions**. Enter only details that can be tied to a current document or live record.

Missteps that change the answer

- Shipping before the permit route is ready
- Using a vague product description
- Assuming the agent owns compliance
- Ignoring import GST in cash flow
- Failing to correct a changed shipment

If one of these conditions appears, pause before payment, submission, travel or implementation and reconcile it through the relevant official service. Save the issued result or acknowledgement; a search snippet or forwarded screenshot cannot establish a current entitlement.

Give the forwarder a one-page shipment brief

List the importer UEN, product description, HS code, origin, customs value basis, control approval and permit contact. Attach source documents rather than copying uncertain data into email. The brief makes responsibilities visible and gives the declaring agent a chance to question a mismatch while there is still time to correct it before arrival.

Related next steps

Once this decision is settled, you may need to [map the annual-return deadline](#). The next adjacent check is to [check the small-company audit test](#).

Common questions

Does every commercial import need attention to a permit?

Yes. Singapore Customs regulates imported goods and the applicable permit route must be checked. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Can a declaring agent handle everything?

It can lodge declarations, but the importer remains responsible for accurate information. [Singapore Customs import-permit guide](#).

Are all imports dutiable?

No. Duty applies to specified categories, while import GST generally remains relevant. [Singapore Customs import procedures](#).

Rules, service details and schedules can change. Reopen the linked official page before acting when the date, eligibility, payment destination, safety instruction or live availability is decisive.

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