

15 Questions Importers Ask Before Hiring a Clearing Agent

Clear answers on fees, timing, documents and risks

Straight answers to the questions we hear most often from importers, so you know what to expect before you start.

1. What does a clearing agent do?

A clearing agent prepares and lodges your customs declaration, classifies your goods, calculates duty and taxes, deals with customs and other agencies on your behalf, and arranges release and onward delivery.

2. Do I have to use a clearing agent?

Customs procedures are technical, and mistakes cost time and money. Most importers use a licensed agent, and commercial consignments are normally cleared through one.

3. What will it cost me?

Agent fees depend on the type, value and complexity of the consignment, so we quote per shipment. You also pay government duty and taxes, plus any port, storage or transport charges. Ask for a written quotation that separates them.

4. How long does clearance take?

With complete, correct documents and duty paid, straightforward consignments can clear quickly, often within a day or two. Inspections, queries, missing permits or documents that do not match will extend this.

5. What documents do I need?

At minimum: commercial invoice, packing list and transport document, plus your registration details. Many goods need permits or certificates as well. See our Commercial Imports Checklist.

6. What is ASYCUDA?

ASYCUDA is the electronic customs system ZIMRA uses. Your agent captures your declaration in it, and it is used for assessment and payment.

7. What is CIF and how is duty calculated?

CIF means cost, insurance and freight. Duty is generally worked out on the CIF value plus other charges up to the first point of entry, then the duty rate, surtax where it applies, and VAT are applied.

8. Can I pay less duty under a trade agreement?

Possibly. Zimbabwe is a member of SADC and COMESA, and goods that qualify as originating in a member country can attract reduced or zero duty, if you hold the correct Certificate of Origin. See our SADC and COMESA guide.

9. What happens if my goods are held?

Goods can be held for missing documents, valuation queries, classification disputes, inspection or missing permits. Contact your agent immediately: the sooner the issue is resolved, the lower the storage charges.

10. Which border post should I use?

It depends on where the goods come from, the type of cargo and the destination. Main points include Beitbridge, Chirundu, Plumtree, Forbes, Nyamapanda, Kazungula and the main airports. Your agent will advise on the best route and any restrictions on certain goods at certain posts.

11. Do I need to be registered with ZIMRA?

Yes. Importers need to be registered with ZIMRA and have a BP number. Individuals importing for personal use use their ID or passport details.

12. What is a Certificate of Conformity?

A certificate issued under the CBCA programme showing that regulated goods meet the required standards. Goods on the list need it to clear. See our CBCA explainer.

13. Can I import goods for personal use?

Yes, but the same rules on documents, permits, duty and restricted goods apply. Rebates and exemptions exist for some categories, such as returning residents, with conditions.

14. What if my documents are wrong?

Errors can delay clearance, cause extra charges or lead to penalties. Check them before shipping and tell us immediately if you spot a mistake after shipping. Never alter documents yourself.

15. How do I get a quote?

Send us the goods description, quantity and value, the supplier and country of origin, the transport mode, the border post or port, and copies of any documents you have. We will tell you the requirements and give you a written quote.

Need help with this consignment? Speak to your George Steward clearing agent before the goods ship. Getting the paperwork right at the start avoids delays and storage charges at the border.

General guidance only, not legal or tax advice. Requirements, permits and rates are set by ZIMRA and other regulators and change from time to time. Confirm the requirements for your specific shipment with your George Steward clearing agent before you ship. Last reviewed: October 2026.