



Media Outlet: Washington Examiner

Date: November 17, 2021

Online Unique Visitors Per Month: 1,477,883

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Foldable shipping containers gain interest amid supply chain crisis

by [Zachary Halaschak, Economics Reporter](#) |

| November 17, 2021 01:20 PM

Shipping containers that can fold and use less space are gaining some attention as ports and warehouses handle massive overloads of backlogged crates.

Intermodal containers, better known as shipping containers, were standardized by the International Maritime Association decades ago. Most commonly, the large metal units, a ubiquitous sight on ships and at ports, are 8 feet wide by either 20 or 40 feet long. But creators of containers that can fold and take up less space are hoping their concept will catch on.



Nearly 30% of the 20-foot shipping containers that traverse global ports this year will be empty, *Bloomberg* [reported](#). Those empty units waiting to be filled take up valuable space, especially during a [supply chain](#) crunch like the one being seen today. If those unfilled units were able to be folded and shrunk down, they could help navigate the industry out of its current snarls. One company that is hoping foldable containers are the wave of the future is Holland Container Innovations, which after five years of development created the world's first fully certified foldable shipping container. Their "[4Fold](#)" units can collapse to a mere quarter of their volume.

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"Four folded containers take up as much space as one regular container when stacked. This means you only need one truck or rail wagon to return four empty containers. Also on vessels, on depots, and in terminals we save 75% of space," the company said on its website.

The 4Fold containers are not only being advertised for their financial and monetary benefits, but also for the environmental advantage of creating a more sustainable supply chain at a time when countries across the world are passing laws to reduce emissions and setting sustainability goals. More than a dozen shipping companies are now testing the 4Fold containers with hopes that they, and other units like them, could become more commonplace. Amid the pandemic last year, the company announced a partnership with Proctor & Gamble.

Another company that has built foldable shipping containers is Staxxon, a New Jersey-based business that just recently [began taking](#) pre-order deposits for their units, which come in 20-foot and 40-foot sizes. The company boasts that shippers can fit five of the collapsed units in the same slot as one.

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The downsides to foldable shipping containers, and perhaps the reason why they have not gained more popularity, is that they are more expensive to purchase and there may be trepidation in the shipping industry to turning toward a new business model, according to *Bloomberg*.

"Our solution would not only help greatly to alleviate the current crisis, but we'd also go a long way in preventing a similar crisis from occurring in the future," said Santtu Seppala, Staxxon's chief strategy officer.