

High Shipping Prices Hinder Spread of Gospel



AP Images/Gary Kazanjian

Gas prices are finally starting to slowly climb back down in the U.S., and the costs are expected to continue their decline. Over the past few months oil prices have gone down, and yet shipping costs—which rose with the rise in oil costs over the last few years—remain high.

Oil prices are still higher than they were a year ago, which is part of the reason that shipping costs have remained higher as well. Even as oil prices go down, some shipping companies are playing catch-up.

Increased shipping costs have presented a significant dilemma for ministries attempting to send large amounts of aid or resources to far-away nations. Global Aid Network (GAIN), for example, has millions of meals prepared to send to East Africa where severe drought has thrown millions into levels of starvation. However, GAIN has had difficulty procuring the funds to actually send the food to Africa.

In another case, shipping costs are directly affecting the spread of the gospel.

"[In] one of the locations that we just sent to, [shipping] was literally \$2,000 more than it was last year at this time," says Jason Woolford, the executive director of Christian Resources International.

CRI ships Christian literature and Bibles to Christians across the globe, many of whom are pastors and church leaders but have never owned a Bible. For many, it can be dangerous or just financially difficult to obtain Christian resources. But when CRI comes in with thousands of dollars worth of books, they're able to get study Bibles, commentaries, devotionals and more for free, equipping them to better preach the gospel and strengthen their faith.

"We have four sea containers and Great Crates that are waiting to go that represent about \$50,000." The next two containers are scheduled to go to Jamaica and Democratic Republic of Congo. The container headed to Congo is going to rebuild the entire library of a Bible college that was burned down by Muslim extremists.

CRI gets donations of old and new books alike to their Michigan warehouse all the time, but as shipping prices rise, sending these resources out gets much more difficult. If \$50,000 doesn't come in throughout the year, Woolford says, "It means that in fact we can't send as many containers, which means we can't receive as many

materials.”

The effect of fewer containers sent is severe. “It would mean that certain Bible colleges wouldn’t be able to get their accreditation. It would mean that the person that is preaching, if you can imagine, a gentleman preaching his sermons for three months out of one little Daily Bread—it would mean people like him not being able to have a Bible or a pastor’s library.”

Essentially, this chain reaction of events starting with rising shipping prices results in fewer people reached by the gospel. CRI frequently reminds believers that one Bible can reach up to 40,000 people in some cases. Far fewer Bibles and books getting into the hands of believers without proper funding could mean hundreds of thousands fewer ears hearing the Good News.

The stakes are incredibly high. CRI is still on track to send \$5 million in free books across the globe by the end of 2011, but no matter how many books come in, that goal won’t be reached without funding for shipping. Higher shipping prices come at an especially bad time now, during the “death months” for ministries financially: July and August.