

Proper Packing Techniques

By Danielle S. Feldman

I just received another package with damaged resins. Sigh... Most packages would arrive safely to their destinations if the proper precautions were taken, so I wanted to share with you what I have learned (with many thanks to my local UPS guys!).

BOXES

First, start off with a sturdy box that the model fits into with a couple inches or more all around it after being bubble-wrapped. On the bottom of most boxes is a small circle with the box strength listed. The top number refers to the crush test rating of the box. I always look for 200 lb. strength or stronger, especially with resins, which are intrinsically more fragile than plastics. You've probably seen boxes crushed, or with corners collapsed in. Most likely, they didn't have a strong crush test rating. Box strength is important because a heavier box may be placed on your box at some point in the shipping system or it may be dropped. Don't skimp on box strength. Do try to find the most efficient size for the model(s) your shipping as size effects pricing, as well as weight.

With more valuable or brittle pieces, I recommend double boxing. This means that you will use two strong boxes, one that fits inside the other with about an inch or two of space between the boxes on all 6 sides. The inner box is then placed inside the larger box surrounded by foam peanuts. This adds a layer of protection. If the model isn't packed properly within the inner box, damage can still occur.

A special note on chinas, Animal Artistry resins and other models made of more brittle material. One solution is to put them centered in a box with several extra inches of foam peanuts around them on all 6 sides, fully bubble-wrapped, of course, and proceed to double box them as well. Another solution is to purchase a custom, foam-lined case. The interior foam is cut to fit the model exactly, preventing any movement. The case itself is made of a hard material, providing protection from crushing. These are heavy, so you will have pricier shipping costs, as well as the cost of the case itself. I recommend using foam peanuts around these cases within a box to provide additional cushioning when shipping. I've seen these available through model horse venues, as well as sold as gun cases.

BUBBLE WRAP

The larger bubble wrap is strongly preferred over the smaller bubble wrap for traditional scale pieces. I try to use the smaller bubbles on minis and bases, or use several, several layers on larger models to get the same amount of air around the model that the large bubble wrap provides.

Some people like to tape the bubble wrap in place to prevent it from slipping off the model. Personally, I don't prefer having to cut off too much tape and destroying the bubble wrap in an effort to get a model out. I will use a small piece of packing tape to secure the bubble wrap in place if I feel it needs it.

I also like to use an extra layer around the head, sometimes under tails to lend support, or carefully between delicate legs. You can get really creative with building a support system with bubble wrap if you want to spend the time. Just be careful not to put pressure on delicate parts by pulling it too tight or wedging too much in an area.

PEANUTS

Foam peanuts are the best choice for filling a box around a bubble-wrapped model. Fill the bottom of the box with peanuts, place a bubble-wrapped horse in the middle parallel to the bottom, and fill the rest of the box up to the top with more peanuts. If packing more than one horse for shipping, add a layer of peanuts between each horse to cushion.

AIR PILLOWS

Air pillows, for lack of a better term, are little plastic sleeves filled with air and sealed into a pillow shape. I love these for traveling to shows as they are much easier to clean up than spilled foam peanuts. I layer them around the bottom and outside of the box, and in between models as well, and then over the top. Each horse always has one under its head to protect the ears and to prevent it from doing a nosedive deeper into the box. Now for shipping, they are fine in combination with peanuts, but the plastic can slip around, so I wouldn't recommend using them as a lone means of filler when shipping. At least with my show totes I know that they will stay upright for a few hours traveling in the back of my truck, the same can't be said of shipping boxes.

TOILET PAPER

I don't prefer wrapping toilet paper around models because I feel that bubble wrap when used properly and adequately, does a better job. Toilet paper can be messy, leaving static cling fibers on models and it's hard to save for reuse. Some people swear by it. Whether you choose to use it or not, always use bubble wrap around the entire model. If you do use TP, be sure you don't pull too snugly as many ears have snapped under the continuous pressure during shipment.

NEWSPRINT/PAPER FILLER

Do not use newspapers or paper of any kind as filler in your boxes. The reason for this is that the paper will continue to crush throughout shipping, leaving air pockets in your package. Air pockets are dangerous because it allows the model to move within the package. This is how the last shipment sent to me was broken, although double boxed, their wasn't enough filler to secure the models in place within the inner box. Note that they did have toilet paper around their heads, which did not protect them.

A NOTE ON BASES

If a model can be removed from the base, do so. Wrap the base separately in another piece of bubble wrap and pack it separated by foam in another portion of the box. Avoid cramming it in a corner where external pressure may be applied to the box if dropped, etc.

For models permanently attached to their bases, try to make sure no pressure is being applied to the legs or area of attachment at base when laying in the box. One way to do

this is to roll up bubble wrap pieces to support under the model while the model itself is laying parallel to the bottom of the box. You might consider using a larger box to allow for more foam peanut padding around the model, as well as double boxing, or purchase a custom fitted case. Small support discs under the hooves are not as concerning as large and/or heavy bases where the model has been glued down.

TAPE AND LABELING

Clear packing tape is great for sealing up your boxes. Be sure to tape the top and bottom adequately. The USPS used to provide free tape (and still offers boxes and labels) for their priority service. You can go online and order it to be delivered to you free of charge. I always use their tape when shipping priority since it's free! Hopefully, the tape will become available again. Has anyone else noticed it smells like cocoa puffs?

Always put your return address on your packages and the destination clearly marked. Cover up any bar codes, old addresses, labels, etc. on your packages with a permanent black marker or stick blank labels over them. Some stricter post offices may require you to cover any writing on the boxes, including product names, etc.

CARRIER SERVICES

Several choices exist in getting your package from point A to point B. United States Postal Service (USPS), United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express (though insurance isn't available on ground shipments), and DHL. Each one has an online service to calculate shipping costs. I finally picked up a scale at the local office supply store and boy, is it handy! I also keep a tape measurer nearby as size can effect cost as well.

SAVE YOUR PACKAGING

The environment and your pocket book will thank you! I have a plastic bin dedicated to holding peanuts in my basement and one entire corner of the basement holds empty boxes, you can remove the tape and store them flat if space is at a premium. Other spare boxes hold bubble wrap in both sizes. Not everyone has the luxury of storing packing materials, but if you can, it's worth it.

I hope this article will save many more models from damage in their shipping adventures. Good luck and may you never have to file another insurance claim again!