WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

a power interface coupled to a power source to provide electrical power to the apparatus;

a data interface coupled to a data communications port on the shipping container configured to communicate with a controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller monitors an operational parameter associated with the shipping container;

a communications interface coupled to a transmitter; and

a control circuit configured to receive power from the power interface, receive the operational parameter associated with the shipping container from the data interface, and transmit the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container using the communications interface.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container includes an internal temperature of the shipping container.

3. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the internal temperature of the shipping container is measured by the controller of the shipping container.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the shipping container is a refrigerated shipping container.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the power source coupled to the power interface also provides electrical power to the shipping container.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the communications interface coupled to a receiver; and

the control circuit further configured to receive, from the communications interface, control data to alter the operation of the controller of the shipping container and transmit the control data to the controller of the shipping container through the data interface.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the transmitter is a satellite transmitter.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container is received from the controller of the shipping container and is received through the data interface.

9. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the apparatus is physically isolated from an interior cargo portion of the shipping container.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the control circuit further configured to:

identify a communications protocol used by the controller of the shipping container; and

communicate with the controller of the shipping container through the data interface using the identified communications protocol.

11. A method for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

receiving an operational parameter associated with the shipping container from a controller of the shipping container;

determining, with a processor, if the operational parameter associated with the container should be transmitted to a receiving station; and

transmitting the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container to the receiving station based on the determination.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of determining if the operational parameter associated with the container should be transmitted comprises:

determining if it is time for periodic reporting.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of determining if the operational parameter associated with the container should be transmitted comprises:

determining if the operational parameter associated with the container is outside a pre-defined range.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container includes an internal temperature of the shipping container.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein the shipping container is a refrigerated shipping container.

16. The method of claim 11 further comprising:

receiving control data, the control data used to control the operation of the shipping container; and

sending the control data to the controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller of the shipping container alters the operation of the shipping container based on the control data.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the control data includes a temperature set point for the shipping container.

18. A non-transitory computer readable medium containing thereon a set of instructions which when executed by the computer case the computer to execute the method of claim 11.

19. A system for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

a monitoring and communications controller configured to communicate with a controller of a shipping container to receive an operational parameter associated with the shipping container and send the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container to a data server computer; and

the data server computer configured to receive the operational parameter associated with the shipping container from the monitoring and communications controller and send the operational parameter associated with the shipping container to a user.

20. The system of claim 19 further comprising:

the data server computer further configured to receive, from the user, control data used to control the operation of the shipping container; and

the monitoring and communications controller further configured to receive the control data from the data server computer and send the control data to the controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller of the shipping container alters the operation of the shipping container based on the control data.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

a power interface coupled to a power source to provide electrical power to the apparatus;

a data interface coupled to a data communications port on the shipping container configured to communicate with a controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller of the shipping container monitors an operational parameter associated with the shipping container;

a communications interface coupled to a transmitter; and

a control circuit configured to receive power from the power interface,

the control unit further configured to receive the operational parameter associated with the shipping container via the data interface from the controller of the shipping container, and

the control unit further configured to determine if the operational parameter associated with the shipping container should be transmitted and transmit the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container using the communications interface.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container includes an internal temperature of the shipping container.

3. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the internal temperature of the shipping container is measured by the controller of the shipping container.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the shipping container is a refrigerated shipping container.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the power source coupled to the power interface also provides electrical power to the shipping container.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the communications interface coupled to a receiver; and

the control circuit further configured to receive, from the communications interface, control data to alter the operation of the controller of the shipping container and transmit the control data to the controller of the shipping container through the data interface.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the transmitter is a satellite transmitter.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container is received from the controller of the shipping container and is received through the data interface.

9. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the apparatus is physically isolated from an interior cargo portion of the shipping container.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the control circuit further configured to:

identify a communications protocol used by the controller of the shipping container; and

communicate with the controller of the shipping container through the data interface using the identified communications protocol.

11. A method for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

receiving, at a communications and monitoring device, an operational parameter associated with the shipping container from a controller of the shipping container;

determining, by the communications and monitoring device, if the operational parameter received from the controller of the shipping container and associated with the container should be transmitted to a receiving station; and

transmitting the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container to the receiving station based on the determination.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of determining if the operational parameter associated with the container should be transmitted comprises:

determining if it is time for periodic reporting.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein the step of determining if the operational parameter associated with the container should be transmitted comprises:

determining if the operational parameter associated with the container is outside a pre-defined range.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein the operational parameter associated with the shipping container includes an internal temperature of the shipping container.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein the shipping container is a refrigerated shipping container.

16. The method of claim 11 further comprising:

receiving control data, the control data used to control the operation of the shipping container; and

sending the control data to the controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller of the shipping container alters the operation of the shipping container based on the control data.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the control data includes a temperature set point for the shipping container.

18. A non-transitory computer readable medium containing thereon a set of instructions which when executed by the computer case the computer to execute the method of claim 11.

19. A system for communicating with a shipping container comprising:

a monitoring and communications controller configured to communicate with a controller of a shipping container to receive an operational parameter associated with the shipping container, determine if the operational parameter received from the controller of the shipping container should be sent, and send the operational parameter, or a derivative thereof, associated with the shipping container to a data server computer; and

the data server computer configured to receive the operational parameter associated with the shipping container from the monitoring and communications controller and send the operational parameter associated with the shipping container to a user.

20. The system of claim 19 further comprising:

the data server computer further configured to receive, from the user, control data used to control the operation of the shipping container; and

the monitoring and communications controller further configured to receive the control data from the data server computer and send the control data to the controller of the shipping container, wherein the controller of the shipping container alters the operation of the shipping container based on the control data.