



ICAO

TENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL AVIATION SAFETY GROUP -
ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL (RASG-APAC/10)

(Bangkok, Thailand, 17-18 December 2020 on Virtual Platform)

RASG-APAC/10-WP/22

Agenda Item 5

Agenda Item 5: ICAO / Member State / Industry Presentations

**SAFETY ASSURANCE OF GROUND HANDLING OPERATIONS DURING AND
POST-COVID-19**

(Presented by International Air Transport Association)

SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted airline, airport and, in many cases, regulator resources, including resources normally devoted to oversight activities. The impact may be long-lasting. To support and supplement the air operator's oversight of outsourced ground handling operations, the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) exists as an independent assessment of a ground handling service provider against industry-developed organization, management and operational standards. ISAGO continues to operate despite the pandemic and provides safety assurances of ground operations. The safety assurances are demonstrated by the operations provided by the ground handling service providers that have been audited by ISAGO and in the information provided in the ISAGO audit reports. The ISAGO audit reports can, if recognized by the regulatory authority, compensate for the lack of an air operator's own oversight audits. In addition, the ISAGO audits and audit reports provide assurances that contribute to a State Safety Programme, supplementing aerodrome certification and aerodrome licensing requirements and filling the ground handling regulatory void.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ground handling operations are performed by air operators with self-handling facilities or are outsourced to ground handling service providers contracted by the air operator. The ground handling operations are performed in accordance with, in most cases, procedures based on industry best practices developed and published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). State regulations usually make the contracting air operator responsible for oversight of the outsourced operations. To support and supplement the air operator's oversight, the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) exists as an independent assessment of a ground handling service provider against industry-developed organization, management and operational standards. Over 220 ground handling service providers are currently registered under ISAGO. ISAGO audits have been performed on more than 300 ground handling service provider "stations" located at over 230 airports worldwide. IATA provides details of ISAGO registrations, station accreditations and access to audit reports to airlines, regulators and airports that support the ISAGO program.

1.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted airline, airport and, in many cases, regulator resources, including resources normally devoted to oversight activities. The impact may be long-lasting.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The ISAGO program response to the impact of the pandemic was three-fold: to implement relief measures, to maintain safety assurances and to support recovery.

2.2 In March 2020, extenuating circumstances were applied to expiring ISAGO registrations and station accreditations where travel restrictions or severe downturn in operations prevented onsite renewal audits taking place. Additional time was given in the hope that travel restrictions would be lifted. This happened in some cases but was short-lived and nine months later the chances of an onsite audit are very low.

2.3 The ground handling service provider was required to submit bi-monthly an extenuating circumstances questionnaire in the immediate absence of a renewal audit. The questionnaire detailed the impact on the services provided and outlined the measures taken to maintain safe operations. All questionnaires were provided to airlines that support ISAGO.

2.4 In 2020, about 33 onsite audits took place. However, where travel restrictions and lack of operations prevented an onsite audit, an alternative audit method was made available. The alternative audit method involved a remote audit (that had to be closed before the extenuating circumstances deadline) and then an onsite follow-up audit would be performed, when possible, and closed within six months. Closure of an ISAGO audit means that all findings are closed. The first remote audit took place in August and over 60 remote audits have been performed since.

2.5 The alternative audit method uses a reduced checklist, essential standards deemed the minimum to assure an assessment of safety. The cost of the audit is also reduced.

2.6 It is likely that the alternative audit method will be in place until Q3 2021 at least, until travel restrictions are lifted fully and all onsite follow-up audits are closed. ISAGO continues to operate and provide safety assurances of ground operations. The safety assurances are demonstrated by the operations provided by the ground handling service providers that have been audited by ISAGO and in the information provided in the ISAGO audit reports.

2.7 The ISAGO audit reports can, if recognized by the regulatory authority, compensate for the lack of an air operator's own oversight audits. In addition, the ISAGO audits and audit reports provide assurances that contribute to a State Safety Programme, supplementing aerodrome certification and aerodrome licensing requirements and filling the ground handling regulatory void. The ISAGO auditing standards, outlined in the ISAGO Standards Manual, require a fully implemented safety management system and are fully aligned with the corresponding ground handling service provider provisions specified in ICAO Doc 10121, *Manual on Ground Handling*, which was published in December 2019.

2.8 The publication of Doc 10121 demonstrated that ICAO acknowledges the safety implications in ground handling and its inclusion in a State Safety Programme. This position is acknowledged further by making ground handling a specific agenda item at the Third High Level Safety Conference, scheduled for 17-21 May 2021.

2.9 Regulators, air operators and airports can apply to IATA to gain access to ISAGO registration information and the ISAGO audit reports. Regulators and airports are also invited to observe ISAGO audits and participate in mutually beneficial activities through memorandum of understanding or similar agreements. The IATA regional office in Singapore can assist.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) To acknowledge the contribution of ISAGO in the oversight of ground handling and recognize the safety assurance benefits that ISAGO brings during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b) To encourage States to complement their State Safety Programme and air operator regulatory activities through recognition of ISAGO as an acceptable means of oversight of ground handling service providers.

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