IFALPA
THE GLOBAL VOICE OF PILOTS
SAFETY BULLETIN

One Level of Safety Worldwide | Safety Bulletin No. 05SAB003 29 June 2004

Air Transport of Infectious Substances

INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY THE IFALPA DANGEROUS GOODS (DG) COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, dangerous goods shipments containing Infectious Substances were fully regulated and controlled in transportation.

However, at the latest International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Dangerous Goods Panel meeting the regulations were revised so that Infectious Substances are now divided into two Categories (A and B), with Category B substances being exempted from the majority of the previous requirements.

Category B substances are classified as having a low risk in transportation (mainly to an individual), while Category A substances have the potential to cause a wider outbreak of disease. An example of a Category A substance is the Ebola virus, while Category B includes the HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C viruses.

During transport, Category B substances are only subjected to the requirement to be packed in triple layer packaging, which must be able to withstand a 95 kPa pressure differential, although no testing of the packaging is required.

IFALPA strongly opposes this virtually uncontrolled transport of Category B substances. Unfortunately, a proposal to include shipments of Category B substances on the Notification to Captain (NOTOC) was narrowly defeated at ICAO, necessitating this Safety Bulletin.

MAIN ISSUE

This is the first time that Dangerous Goods needing Emergency Response will be allowed to travel anonymously in the transportation system. The only other Dangerous Goods shipments allowed as general cargo are Dangerous Goods in Excepted Quantities. Because of their minute quantities, however, they pose a very low risk per package, requiring no Emergency Response in the event of an incident or accident.

It is important to note that the World Health Organisation (WHO) specifies the same precautions and Emergency Response procedures for both Category A and B Infectious Substances.

The packages containing Category B Infectious Substances have no Infectious Substance hazard label, but rather a black and white diamond shaped label with **UN3373** printed within the diamond. This might cause confusion, as a diamond shaped label generally identifies a DG shipment for which additional procedures apply. The shipping name "Diagnostic Specimens" might also cause confusion, as UN3373 packages are intended to contain only Category B Infectious Substances.

In order to provide a minimum acceptable level of Emergency Response while these shipments are on board an aircraft, the following procedures are proposed in the absence of more specific guidance:

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES

If UN3373 shipments are identified on board the aircraft (the packages will be mainly of a small size), the crew should note the quantity of the shipment and its position on board.

Although these packages may be shipped as general cargo, they are expected to be shipped mainly as Airmail, and could be in any mailbag. A leaking or damaged mailbag should therefore be treated with suspicion (Note: This could also be something other than UN3373). If the packaging is compromised or damaged in any way, the shipment should be removed from the aircraft in accordance with the procedures for removing other damaged dangerous goods shipments.

If Emergency Response is needed during flight because of an incident involving a UN3373 shipment, the Drill Code applicable for (Category A) Infectious Substances should be used (Drill Code 6).

Note: From the first of January, 2005, a new Drill Code (11) will be applicable for Infectious Substances.

If Emergency Response is needed while the aircraft is on the ground, Emergency Responders and specialists should be summoned to deal with the situation.

Again, the same procedures outlined for (Category A) Infectious Substances would be applicable for incidents involving UN3373 shipments.

These procedures are found in the ICAO Emergency Response Guide or in the applicable operations manuals.

Additional information might be found on the package and in its shipping papers.

CONCLUSION

Although these changes are officially effective January 1st 2005, Category B Infectious Substances are already allowed and are moving anonymously in transportation, due partly to a previous change in the Regulations. As no suitable additional procedures from other International Organizations are operational, this Safety Bulletin has been drafted by the IFALPA Dangerous Goods (DG) Committee.

This Bulletin is not meant to advocate the refusal of shipments, since there may be pressing medical reasons necessitating the transport of these shipments.

It is expected, however, that States and Airlines will put restrictions and/or additional procedures in place to assure safe transportation of these Infectious Substances.

Any additional procedures so enacted will take precedence over this Safety Bulletin.



