



**Thirty Sixth Regional Aviation Safety Group — Pan America Executive Steering Committee Meeting
(ESC/36)**

19 to 20 May 2021

Agenda Item 4: Other business

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

(Presented by IATA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
Action:	The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted airline, airport and, probably, 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 via the safety audits of ground operations against the industry best practices and supported by 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 can provide safety assurances that contribute to a State Safety Programme, supplementing aerodrome certification and aerodrome licensing requirements and filling the ground handling regulatory void.
<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Safety, Ground Operations
<i>References:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IATA ISAGO Program

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 and standards based on industry best practices published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). These procedures, standards and best practices are generated by technical groups of subject matter experts from both airlines and ground service providers. 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 230 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 200 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, probably, 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 assurance 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.

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, the audit schedule was severely impacted by the pandemic outbreak. Of the originally planned 250 audits, many were postponed; however, 104 audits were performed, of which 57 were normal onsite audits. 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. Closure of an ISAGO audit means that all findings are closed. The first remote audit took place in August 2020. It was still the case early 2021 that about 50% of audits were affected by travel restrictions and therefore performed remotely.

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 The continuation and, in places, escalation of travel restrictions in 2021 required the extended application of remote audits. It is likely that the alternative audit method will be in place until Q3 2021 at least, until travel restrictions are lifted fully, and normal onsite audits can be performed. 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, which has now been incorporated in the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) to be held in October 2021.

2.9 In April 2021, the association of the ISAGO program with ICAO Doc 10121 was presented at the Ground Handling Webinar for the SAM Region organized by the ICAO Lima office. Details can be found here:

<https://www.icao.int/SAM/Pages/MeetingsDocumentation.aspx?m=2021-RLA06901-GHANDLING>

2.10 It is IATA's Members strong opinion, that there is no need to reinvent the wheel, where use can be made of the existing industry best practices, originating from airlines who were originally exercising self-handling and, at present, are the major consumers of ground handling services.

2.11 Regulators, air operators and airports can apply to IATA to gain access to ISAGO registration information. 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 for the Americas Region can assist.

3. **Suggested Actions**

3.1 The RASP-PA ESG is invited to:

- a) Note the contents of this paper: and
- b) 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.
- c) 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.