

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE TRANSPORT OF DANGEROUS GOODS AND ON THE GLOBALLY HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS

Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

Thirty-second session
Geneva, 3-7 December 2007

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

ELECTRONIC DATA INTERCHANGE (EDI) FOR DOCUMENTATION PURPOSES

Opportunities to Reduce Impediments to Multimodal and Intermodal Transportation of Dangerous Goods

Transmitted by the International Vessel Operators Hazardous Materials Association (VOHMA)

Discussion

1. A review of recent publicized statistics in international journals indicates an average rate of increase in the volume of global freight container traffic of 10 % annually. The worldwide terminal throughput was reported to be 441.3 million TEUs for the year 2006 with a projected total of over 741 million in 2012. The report of Cargo Systems indicates that the top 100 ports in the world have increased their throughput at an even greater rate from 255,137,396 for 2003 to 289,788,013 for 2004 representing an increase of 34,730,946 TEUs or almost 14 %. The statistics for the current year will undoubtedly reflect similar or even more significant increases. In order to meet the demand, many new container-ships currently sail with capacities approaching 13,000 TEUs per vessel.
2. The design capacities of port facilities and terminals throughout the world have already reached or are rapidly approaching maximum capability. In addition, the infrastructure for transferring containerised cargoes between multiple modes of transport and transporting these TEUs by road and rail are also being utilized beyond the original design capacity in many instances. Congestion in the multimodal transportation systems throughout the world will result in significant additional costs for distribution of goods. Even more important, delays in the transportation of dangerous goods will present significant challenges to safety as result of such congestion.

3. In order to proactively meet the expected challenges to efficient and safe transportation the logistics chain must provide a seamless integration of carriage by all modes and between modes. The regulatory scheme to ensure safe carriage of dangerous goods must be designed with the flexibility to permit such seamless integration without compromising safety or security. VOHMA has recognized the growing concerns regarding worldwide congestion and has assumed a role as a facilitator to offer an opportunity for representatives of all modes of transport as well as government regulatory officials to participate in a joint initiative to identify impediments that might exacerbate congestion and to examine opportunities to reduce or even eliminate these impediments. As a means of embarkation on this important mission, VOHMA invited representatives of the US DOT to attend an intermodal presentation conducted in June 2007 at the Port of Newark NJ during which a tour of the container terminal as well as a shipboard tour of a containership was conducted. During the tours, issues which had been identified as perceived impediments to the multimodal transport of dangerous goods were brought to the attention of the participants by means of reviewing terminal acceptance of containers, booking procedures, examining actual documents, and observing discharge, loading and stowage activities. Following the tour, high level officials of the US DOT, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, PHMSA, met with VOHMA Administrators and advised that transportation congestion and infrastructure capacity had already been identified as a high priority within their Administration and agreed to partner with VOHMA in seeking solutions.

4. On October 11, 2007, VOHMA hosted a meeting in Washington DC with invited representatives of the International Air Transport Association, several air carriers, the Federal Railroad Administration, railway representatives, the American Trucking Associations, motor carriers, Federal Motor Carrier Administration, Federal Highway Administration, US Coast Guard, PHMSA, VOHMA Administrators and several ocean carriers. Each mode was invited to introduce any issues that they felt were impediments to safe, efficient intermodal transportation. Action items for further discussion were recorded. The most predominant issue addressed by all modes was lack of continuity in hazard communication between modes and even within modes. Of those issues, the majority cited documentation as the greatest impediment experienced.

5. At the meeting, IATA presented their initiative on "E-freight" which was submitted to the ICAO Dangerous Goods Panel and to this Sub-Committee in December 2006 as UN/SCETDG/30/INF.51 and again in July 2007 as UN/SCETDG/31/INF.5 proposing that Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) be authorized as an alternative to a document. IATA requested that EDI be included in the work plan of the 2007-2008 biennium. The railroad representatives also discussed EDI systems currently in use by the North American railroads. PHMSA presented information on a program currently being considered within the US DOT to address improving safety and efficiency through introduction of regulatory authorization for EDI that would facilitate commerce without jeopardizing availability of vital information required by emergency responders at the scene of an incident. VOHMA reiterated our previous position on the subject as declared to this Sub-Committee at previous sessions in support of moving forward with EDI authorization and providing input through the Secretariat to UN/CEFACT. It was decided that additional meetings would be hosted by VOHMA in the near future and that other stakeholders, such as dangerous goods shippers and emergency responders should be invited.

Proposal

6. Distinguished experts of governments, NGO representatives, and all members of this Sub-Committee are invited to note the work currently in progress, to provide input and to participate to whatever degree practicable. VOHMA will provide additional information on impediments to intermodal transportation as identified and report recommendations to reduce or eliminate such impediments in global commerce as they are developed.