Ground Check

Auditors have completed nearly 50 of IATA's safety audits for ground service providers, aimed at dramatically reducing the costs of ground damage.

BY LINDA WERFELMAN

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), whose safety audits have become a staple for operators worldwide, is extending the practice to ground operations with implementation of the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operators (ISAGO).

The first ISAGO audits were conducted in 2008, and by May 2009, 48 had been completed, said Günther Matschnigg, IATA senior vice president for safety, operations and infrastructure. By October, about 100 audits will have been completed, and the results then will be analyzed to determine industrywide trends, Matschnigg said.

"With each audit, we learn something," he said. Nevertheless, before trends can be identified, "we need to have quite a good array of information."

IATA has described safety as the top priority of the ISAGO program, and ISAGO audits have two purposes: to reduce the number of redundant audits performed by airlines on their ground service providers and, ultimately, to reduce ground damage to aircraft, Matschnigg said.

Beginnings

The ISAGO program is a product of IATA's Ground Damage Prevention Program, which was begun in 2005 with a goal of halving the annual cost of ground damage — estimated at $4 billion for the airline industry, plus an additional $1 billion for corporate aircraft operators — by 2010. In 2008, ground damage was estimated to have been responsible for 17 percent of aviation accidents.

IATA describes the ISAGO program as "an audit system conducted in a standardized and consistent manner, using internationally recognized quality auditing principles." In comparison, the audits conducted before the advent of ISAGO typically had different standards, and there was little sharing of audit information.

Because ground service providers perform diverse activities ranging from passenger and baggage handling to load control and cargo handling, the ISAGO audit has been "built upon a backbone of audit standards applicable to all ground handling companies worldwide," IATA says.[1]

"It's clear we have created something the industry needs and values," Mike O'Brien, the director of the ISAGO program, said in an IATA publication. "For the first time, we have a common set of globally applicable operating standards for ground handlers, coupled with an audit program to assess conformity with those standards."[2]

The audits are conducted at both the headquarters of ground service providers and at their airport stations.

Headquarters audits focus on operational management and control and last about two to three days; station audits last one to two days.

Standards for the audits, published in the *ISAGO Standards Manual*,[3] are "specified systems, policies, programs, processes, procedures, plans, sets of measures, facilities, components, types of equipment or any other aspects of ground operations under the scope of ISAGO that are considered an operational necessity and with which a provider will be expected to be in conformity at the conclusion of the audit."

The manual also contains recommended practices considered "operationally desirable," although compliance is optional.

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Eight sections are included in the manual: "Organisation and Management System," "Station Management System," "Load Control," "Passenger Handling," "Baggage Handling," "Aircraft Handling and Loading," "Aircraft Ground Movement" and "Cargo and Mail Handling."

ISAGO's headquarters audits are performed by the organizations that conduct audits under the IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) program, which was the model for ISAGO. Members of the ISAGO Audit Pool, consisting of auditors designated by participating airlines, perform station audits. The results of audits performed by members of the audit pool are shared by all participating airlines, eliminating the need for individual audits to be commissioned by each airline that uses the services of a particular ground service provider at a particular airport. In May, about three dozen airlines were members of the audit pool.

After a ground service provider has undergone an audit and accomplished all changes recommended by the auditor, the company is listed on the ISAGO Registry. IATA says the registration applies first to a ground service provider's headquarters; stations are incorporated into the registry individually, as subsequent audits show that they are in compliance with ISAGO standards.

In addition to audits, the ISAGO program also provides three-day training programs for ground service providers at locations around the world to acquaint them with ISAGO standards and recommended practices and help them prepare for an ISAGO audit.

IATA says that the overall benefits of the program — in addition to safer operations with fewer accidents and injuries — include reduced costs not only because of the reduction in accidents but also because of the elimination

of redundant audits, improved safety oversight, harmonized standards and auditor training, and "enhanced understanding of high-risk areas within ground operations."[4]

Airport authorities and regulators also stand to benefit from ISAGO because of the improved oversight of ground service providers that the audit program will provide, IATA said.

Foundation Programs

Flight Safety Foundation began its related Ground Accident Prevention (GAP) program in 2003, after one of its airline members requested help in improving ramp safety to reduce injuries and damage.

Using data developed by IATA, the Foundation estimates that 27,000 accidents and incidents — one per 1,000 departures — occur every year on the ground at airports worldwide. These events cause about 243,000 injuries every year.[5]

When injury-related costs, such as medical treatment and other factors, are included, they boost the estimated price tag for airline-related ground damage from $4 billion a year to at least $10 billion worldwide, according to the Foundation.[6]

The GAP program's goals were the development of information, e-tools and other products to prevent accidents and incidents on airport ramps (aprons) and adjacent taxiways. The program also aimed to eliminate accidents during the movement of aircraft into and out of hangars, and during other operations.

Among the GAP e-tools developed by the Foundation are a model for calculating an operator's ground-damage-related costs; a series of "leadership tip sheets" — one-page briefings intended to enhance senior managers' awareness of ground

safety problems and of the importance of a companywide safety management system; a three-part video about the towing of corporate/business aircraft; and a template that presents industry best practices and guidelines to help operators develop standard operating procedures for addressing an array of ramp operations. Subjects include positioning ground service equipment, preventing foreign object damage, selecting protective clothing and equipment, loading and unloading cargo aircraft, using hand signals, handling dangerous goods, and moving an empty aircraft. ●

Notes

1. IATA. *ISAGO: IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations*. <www.iata.org/ps/certification/isago>.

2. IATA. "Safety First." *Airlines International* Issue 19 (April–May 2009): 15.

3. IATA. *ISAGO Standards Manual*, Montreal. May 2008. <www.iata.org/NR/rdonlyres/325E255A-D9F6-4FA8-B10A-04A2F79FFC38/0/ISAGOStandardsManualEd1Rev0.pdf>.

4. IATA. *ISAGO Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*. <www.iata.org/NR/rdonlyres/90CDF880-EDCB-474C-A8D0-F77B48024B27/0/ISAGOFAQ.pdf>.

5. Flight Safety Foundation. *Ground Accident Prevention*. <www.flightsafety.org/gap.html>.

6. Lacagnina, Mark. "Defusing the Ramp." *AeroSafety World* Volume 2 (May 2007): 20–24.

Further Reading From FSF Publications

Werfelman, Linda. "Error Management." *AeroSafety World* Volume 4 (February 2009): 26–31.

Bjelkerud, Magnus; Funnemark, Espen. "Under New Management." *AeroSafety World* Volume 3 (July 2008): 42–47.

Johnson, William B.; Hackworth, Carla. "Human Factors in Maintenance." *AeroSafety World* Volume 3 (March 2008): 34–40.