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ITCO TO PROMOTE SAFE, GREEN AND EFFICIENT TANK CONTAINERS AT TRANSPORT LOGISTIC 2009 IN MUNICH

The International Tank Container Organisation (ITCO) will unveil a new tranche of industry knowledge on intermodal tank containers in three specialist presentations to be made at the Transport Logistic 2009 event in Munich on 12-15 May 2009. Two of the papers highlight recent studies which bring together a wide range of established knowledge to explain why tank containers are the safest, most reliable and efficient means of transporting bulk liquids, powders and gases. The third presentation will break completely new ground by describing how tank containers have a lower 'carbon footprint' than alternative forms of transport.

ITCO will once again have its own Tank Container Village within the large Transport Logistic Exhibition at the New Munich Trade Fair Centre this coming May. A total of 1,600 exhibitors from 53 countries will participate in the overall Exhibition and within the ITCO Tank Village companies offering equipment and services to the global tank container industry will display their wares. The Special Tank Container Seminar at which the three ITCO presentations will be made will take place in a conference room adjacent to the Tank Village on 13 and 14 May.

The three presentations, which will be given by industry experts responsible for their compilation, are as follows:

1. "Safe Handling of Tank Containers" by Bill Brassington of ETS Consulting
2. "Raising the Profile of Tank Containers with Deepsea Shipping Lines" by Dave Dawson
3. "The Environmental Impact of Tank Containers Compared to Alternative Forms of Transport" by Alan Braithwaite of LCP Consulting

The presentations, and the implications of their findings for all those engaged in the transport of liquids, powders and gases, are described below.

“Safe Handling of Tank Containers”

Although tank containers have built an exemplary safety record over the past 35 years and the current global fleet of 250,000-plus units has been expanding at a record rate over the past three years, a number of recent incidents have resulted in questions being raised in certain quarters about the inherent safety of tanks. Although none of the incidents involved the loss of a tank’s contents, valve leakages and tank top working accidents have resulted in injuries to personnel.

Over the past two years ITCO has worked with ICHCA International to prepare the “Safe Handling of Tank Containers” document. Laid out in 14 illustrated chapters and six annexes over 60 pages, “Safe Handling of Tank Containers” has been compiled as the definitive industry document for safe tank container operations. ICHCA International has labelled the document as Briefing Pamphlet No 30.

The pamphlet embraces the good working practices that have been developed by the tank container industry over the past four decades and is made available to assist newcomers to this rapidly expanding transport sector in becoming familiar with the necessary “do’s” and “don’ts” of tank handling. “Safe Handling of Tank Containers” will also serve as a refresher for established industry professionals and as a primer for those tank operations that they may not encounter during the course of their normal working day.

The “Safe Handling of Tank Containers” presentation at the ITCO Tank Village in May will be made by Bill Brassington of ETS Consulting, who has been responsible for most of the compilation work on the guide. As Bill will describe to the seminar audience, a laden tank container can be the heaviest of intermodal containers and a lack of awareness of correct filling levels can result in dangerous cargo surge effects. Furthermore, the large number of both ISO tank containers and outsize swap body tanks in service can raise container stacking compatibility issues at European container depots.

However, as Bill Brassington will point out, tank containers are designed with safety in mind. They are robust units whose materials of construction and fittings and fixtures are fully compatible with the range of products that the tanks are authorised and certified to carry. With a full working knowledge of the subject matter in “Safe Handling of Tank Containers”, operators can ensure a safe working environment for themselves and all those who come into contact with tank containers.

“Safe Handling of Tank Containers” will soon be available for downloading on the ITCO web site by both the Organisation’s members and all other interested parties.

“Raising the Profile of Tank Containers with Deepsea Shipping Lines”

Many container shipping lines do not have a favourable impression of tank containers. Such lines see tanks as heavy units that can cause lifting and shipboard stowage problems. Tank containers are also perceived to be units used almost exclusively for the carriage of hazardous cargoes and, because of the risks associated with such consignments, some shipping lines believe that tanks containing hazardous goods are best avoided.

Dave Dawson, formerly with CP Ships, is assisting with an ITCO initiative to increase awareness of the true nature of tank containers and their operation amongst the shipping lines. As Dave will explain in his presentation at the ITCO Tank Village in Munich this coming May, a principal problem is the shipping lines' lack of familiarity with tank containers. Long gone are the days when many of the leading shipping lines operated their own dedicated fleet of tank containers and employed their own dangerous goods expert who was the key reference point within the company for all bookings of shipments listed in the international Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code.

As shipping lines handed over their tank fleets to specialist operators and streamlined their booking departments to concentrate on their core sea freight business, a certain amount of in-house tank container expertise was lost. ITCO, with the assistance of Dave Dawson, is seeking to reinstate a degree of tank container understanding amongst the container shipping lines. A core document explaining the nature of tanks in the context of shipping operations has been prepared and the presentation is being taken out to the leading shipping lines, with the key personnel responsible for such bookings being the target audience.

The ITCO initiative is also aimed at establishing a better rapport with the shipping lines and to make them aware of the importance of ITCO as an important contact point for any query about tank containers. A key point that ITCO is making to the shipping lines is the sheer volume of good business represented by tank containers. Approximately 150,000 units of the global fleet of 250,000 tank containers are ISO tanks engaged in the deepsea trades. Assuming 4.5 movements per annum for each of those 150,000 tanks, this business represents 675,000 annual movements, even before the repositioning of some empties attendant on such business is taken into account.

Another point that Dave Dawson will make in his presentation at the ITCO Tank Village is that today only about 40 per cent of tank movements involve dangerous goods, down from 65 per cent 20 years ago. The reason for the decreasing percentage is the sheer variety of other goods being transported in tank containers today, as shippers of a growing range of products become aware of the advantages offered by tank containers. Notwithstanding the larger number of products shipped in tank containers, those units constructed for the carriage of dangerous goods are built to stringent standards and have provided sterling performance in service. The rules and regulations governing the construction of tanks used for the carriage of dangerous goods ensure the provision of tanks suitable for a long and safe working life, if operated correctly.

In any case, the shipment of dangerous goods in general is an inherent part of daily life for shipping lines and has been since the global chemical industry rose to prominence over 40 years ago. On container ships on some routes, for example, over 10 per cent of the dry freight containers contain packaged dangerous goods of one class or another.

“The Environmental Impact of Tank Containers Compared to Alternative Forms of Transport”

It has long been appreciated in the tank community that tank containers offer a more environment-friendly means of carrying products to the final customer than alternative forms of transport. In a very basic comparison between a shipment of steel drums in a freight container and a consignment in a tank container, for example, the disparities are stark. A 20-foot freight container can carry 80 drums of 200 litres each, or 16,000 litres in total, while a 20-foot tank can carry 24-25,000 litres, depending on road weight restrictions and the density of the product to be carried. Then, there is the issue of drum disposal and/or recycling. However, until now there has been no definitive evidence of the truth in the belief that tank containers offer a superior environmental option.

ITCO has commissioned Professor Alan Braithwaite and his team of logistics experts at LCP Consulting to employ their Carbon-to-Serve™ methodology to investigate the end-to-end, life cycle environmental impact of tank containers and alternative transport forms such as drums and flexitanks. The results of this study will be available by May 2009. In his presentation at the ITCO Tank Village seminar Alan Braithwaite will first detail the challenges inherent in both generating a reliable estimate of the carbon intensity of different end-to-end supply chains and identifying the benefits that arise from achieving best-in-class performance.

What is certain is that global warming is now an issue impacting every business enterprise and that environmental performance is becoming an embedded and inescapable part of corporate social responsibility. Traditionally, it has not been the responsibility of any one link in the supply chain to look after the environmental impact of the activities elsewhere along the chain. However, that is changing and, as Alan Braithwaite will point out, LCP Consulting's Carbon-to-Serve model holds the potential to not only identify the environmental impact of the entire supply chain but also to foster collaboration along the chain in order to improve overall environmental performance and reduce costs.

The LCP assessment of tank containers and alternative forms of transport will consider the complete supply chain, from manufacture and materials to positioning and handling operations, cleaning, land and sea journeys, port equipment, empty movements, roundtrip potential, life cycles, recycling and ultimate disposal. The key determinant in these environmental impact assessments will be the volumes of carbon dioxide emissions generated. The LCP study will be unlike any other produced for the tank container industry and Alan Braithwaite has promised some surprising conclusions for his ITCO Tank Village audience.

For further information on the ITCO Tank Village at Transport Logistic 2009 in Munich, ITCO's Tank Village seminar and the three presentations themselves, please contact

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