

AWAY WITH THE PAPER

TRANSPORT • ECTA IS CONTINUING WITH ITS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY BY STANDARDISING DATA FLOWS IN THE EUROPEAN CHEMICAL TRANSPORT SECTOR WITH TWO NEW GUIDELINES

THE EUROPEAN CHEMICAL Transport Association (ECTA) has in recent years been promoting the growing use of digital transmission of data through the chemical supply chain, pushing its members (and others) to adopt new technologies and to reap the benefits on offer. That process has included working with other bodies to develop the electronic EFTCO Cleaning Document (e-ECD) and the development of 'milestones' in transport operations to help standardise electronic documentation.

ECTA's digital workgroup has now drawn up two best practice guidelines, one on the exchange of transport order data for bulk chemical shipments and the second on equipment master data standards for bulk and packaged chemicals.

The first of these, on transport order data standards, builds on the transport visibility guideline published in January 2021. In the order-to-cash process within bulk logistics, additional data is exchanged between shippers and logistics service providers (LSPs). Order-related information is transmitted from the shipper to the LSP to specify shipment instructions and, after the transport has been completed, invoice-related information is exchanged to trigger the completion of the service. The payment process involves not just the basic freight cost but also other items, such as heating, waiting time and auxiliary services.

At present, ECTA says, many different electronic data sets are being exchanged between shippers and carriers, leading to extra complexity, process inefficiencies and incorrectly fulfilled customer orders. The objective of this new ECTA guideline

is to give the involved stakeholders additional guidance on how to exchange transport order information in a standard way, so as to further enhance the digital adoption rate and improve interoperability. It also recommends the application of order data standards based on the OAGIS® Chem eStandard 5.4.

MASTER THE DATA

While the transport order data guidelines build on existing work, the new best practice guideline on equipment master data represents a move into a new area. Currently, ECTA says, checklists and data sharing concerning vehicle equipment is a paper-based activity, involving the exchange of pieces of paper by humans at loading and unloading sites, with all the potential for error and falsification. Furthermore, the structure and content of those checklists can vary.

To to bring chemical logistics up to the next level of safety, quality, sustainability and

efficiency, ECTA believes this process needs to be standardised and digitised. This will help customers and suppliers to better address the more complex business needs and equipment requirements at both loading and unloading places.

Such digital sharing of master data regarding equipment is in its infancy, ECTA says. There is the opportunity for players along the supply chain to find new ways to collaborate that will improve operational accuracy and reduce the need for information to be re-keyed in each player's system. Such technology will also make it easier to confirm that applicable regulations and standards are being met.

The ECTA guideline on equipment master data represents a first step in this area and the organisation says it expects it to evolve and expand over time. In this first edition, it is limited to those pieces of equipment that come into closest contact with the chemicals being transported, focusing on box containers, tank containers, tank trailers and tautliners (aka curtain-siders).

The guideline includes a master data template in Excel format for the four different types of transport equipment. This makes it easy to keep information up to date and, by using a standard format, to exchange that information between the various actors in the supply chain.

More information on both new guidelines can be found on the ECTA website at www.ecta.com/guidelines/.

