



*International Civil Aviation Organization*

**MIDANPIRG/20 and RASG-MID/10 Meetings**

*(Muscat, Oman, 14-17 May 2023)*

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**Agenda Item 5.3: AGA/OPS**

**AERODROME OPERATORS' SYSTEMATIC SAFETY OVERSIGHT OF GHSP**

*(Presented by Saudi Arabia)*

**SUMMARY**

In 2016, the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) introduced a new regulatory framework to mitigate the key risk areas in the provision of ground handling services in Saudi Arabia. The regulatory model was first presented at the 40th ICAO Assembly in 2019, and the results of its implementation were subsequently shared at the ICAO High-Level Conference on Covid-19 in 2021 and the 41st ICAO Assembly in 2022.

This paper serves as a follow-up and emphasizes the crucial and indispensable role of aerodrome operators in the day-to-day safety and operational oversight of their Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs).

**REFERENCES**

- A40 WP/456 TE/195
- HLCC 2021-WP/72 SAF/51
- A41-WP/522 TE/189.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 In 2016, a pioneering initiative was undertaken by Saudi Arabia to address the key risk areas in ground handling. GACA released a new regulatory framework, which initially covered the certification of GHSPs through GACAR Part 151, and the licensing of their ground staff through GACAR Part 68. Moreover, an internal implementation guide (E-book Vo. 16) was developed to establish the processes, procedures, and checklists for the implementation of regulatory oversight of the GHSP industry.

1.2 Although the Aviation Authority holds the primary role and responsibility for the regulatory oversight of GHSPs, the day-to-day operational and safety oversight of ground services is inevitably shared between the aerodrome operators and the air operators. While the air operators are responsible for supervising the ground handling services provided to their own aircraft only, aerodrome operators hold the responsibility of ensuring the overall provision of safe, efficient, and high-quality ground handling services at the airport by all GSHPs.

1.3 The aerodrome operator's role and responsibilities in the oversight of GHSPs are based on the local airport bylaws, the aerodrome's Safety Management System, the ground handling agreement or

concession with their GHSPs, and a series of direct or indirect practices referenced in ICAO Doc. 10121/Ch.5, Doc. 9774/4.10(f)/5.5.4, Doc. 9981/3.3, Doc. 9476/8.41(g), Doc. 9137/Part 8/10.5-10.6, and Doc. 9981/7.2.

1.4 However, aerodrome operators have yet to implement a consistent and standardized framework for the systematic safety oversight of their Ground Handling Service Providers. This lack of standardization leads to a disharmonized and voluntary practice, which can compromise airside safety and the consistency of service delivery quality.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

2.1 Aerodrome operators and GHSPs have an intricate and mutually dependent relationship with numerous interfaces in airport operations. This relationship should be governed by a ground handling agreement or concession and rely on close collaboration and cooperation to ensure safe and efficient operations. Ultimately, the aerodrome operator is responsible for and must act as the landlord of its premises.

2.2 In this context, aerodrome operators hold responsibility and accountability for the day-to-day safety oversight of the entire Movement Area. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the 28 certified public aerodromes in Saudi Arabia, where 32 different GHSPs operate a total of 183 ground stations, follow a more standardized and systematic approach in the operational and safety oversight of their GHSPs. This can help reveal any latent hazards and endemic issues in the local ground handling environments.

2.3 GACA is taking the lead in establishing a standardized approach to safety oversight for ground handling service providers at airports. In this respect, GACA has instigated an annual audit and periodic inspections by aerodrome operators for all their GHSPs, recognizing the need for flexibility to allow airports to formulate their own standard operating procedures that are commensurate with the size and complexity of their operations and tailored to their specific requirements.

2.4 A series of kick-off workshops were held, involving all 28 certificated airports in Saudi Arabia, to discuss the necessity and aspects of GHSPs systematic oversight. These workshops addressed the following:

- (a) The scope of the expected aerodrome's oversight system, which should cover all GHSP operational activities such as: (i) ramp handling, (ii) passenger handling, (iii) baggage handling, (iv) freight and mail handling, (v) load control and dispatch, (vi) unit load device control, (vii) aircraft servicing, (viii) into-plane fuel services, (ix) representation and supervision, (x) surface transport, and (xi) in-flight catering services.
- (b) The key safety areas of concern in the ground handling ecosystem on which aerodrome operators should focus their attention, such as: the (i) non-compliance with standard operating procedures, regulations, and airport rules, (ii) inadequate or improper training and unqualified staff, including expiration of licenses and recurrent trainings, (iii) lack of on-site supervision, (iv) shortage of manpower, resources, and staff fatigue, (v) serviceability & maintainability of ground support equipment (GSE), (vi) ineffective quality control and safety management implementation, (vii) lack of safety culture and perhaps commercial pressures on On-Time-Performance (OTP), as well as (viii) the underreporting of occurrences.
- (c) The subjects that should be covered in an agreement between the aerodrome operator and the GHSPs, such as: (i) the scope of services to be provided by the GHSP at an airport (as accepted by GACA), (ii) targeted key performance indicators (KPIs) and efficiency standards for measurable ground service parameters, (iii) targeted safety performance indicators (SPIs) and incident/accident

rates consistent with the SMS of both the concerned GHSP and the airport operator, (iv) the policies/conditions applicable to the ground service provider, (v) the designation of offices, spaces and GSE staging area(s) allocated/leased to the ground service provider, and (vi) if the facilities operated by the ground service provider belong to the airport operator, clear allocation of responsibilities and accountabilities for maintenance, fire safety detection and suppression system serviceability, operational and technical inspections, cleaning, etc.

- (d) The way forward for establishing a concrete process, standard operating procedure(s), and a communication protocol for reporting the outcome of the aerodrome operator's systematic safety oversight to the Aviation Authority.

2.5 Within the context of the workshops, two sets of checklists were shared with the airport community: one for the annual audit of GHSPs and one for day-to-day ramp safety inspections. These documents were developed by GACA as part of its internal implementation procedures for the conduct of regulatory oversight, and were slightly modified to serve as baseline guidance for aerodrome operators to develop their own standard operating procedure(s) and checklists.

2.6 The ground station audit checklists (32 pages) cover the following aspects:

- General / Administration
- Organization
- Operations & safety
- Personnel training
- GSE & maintenance
- Quality assurance
- Subcontracting

2.7 The apron safety inspection checklists (23 pages) cover the following functions and operational phases:

- Aircraft pre-arrival & taxi-in
- Aircraft stopping & GSE positioning
- Passenger disembarkation
- Aircraft servicing general safety precautions
- Baggage & cargo handling (offloading / loading)
- Catering servicing
- Potable water servicing
- Lavatory servicing
- Fuelling servicing
- Passenger boarding
- Pre-departure check & pushback sequence
- Motorized GSE serviceability
- Non-motorized GSE / dollies & carts serviceability
- Operation of GSE

2.8 The aim of sharing the checklists with the airport community was for aerodrome operators to adopt and adapt them to the extent deemed appropriate based on their individual capabilities, scope, requirements, and objectives. Subsequently, they can develop their own procedure of systematic GHSP safety oversight into their corresponding Aerodrome Manual.

2.9 In line with ICAO Doc. 9981 and Doc. 9774, which depict the content and structure of a template Aerodrome Manual, the new concrete process of GHSP safety oversight can be integrated into the "Operational Procedures" chapter of the Aerodrome Manual, after the "Apron Safety Management" section. Moreover, standard operating procedures can supplement the core process described in the Aerodrome Manual.

### **3. CONCLUSION & ACTION BY THE MEETING**

3.1 Aerodrome operators are accountable for airside and landside safety at the airport. Therefore, their systematic safety oversight of GHSPs, who operate across the whole spectrum of activities within the airport operational environment, is imperative for the safe and efficient delivery of high-quality ground services.

3.2 The meeting is invited to take note of the information presented in this paper.

3.3 The General Authority of Civil Aviation is available to all Member States for sharing any material or checklists referenced in this paper.