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Press Release

First community certification project for pharma handling at Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport launches an ambitious BRUcargo pharma certification program confirming its position as the preferred European pharma gateway.

“For several years now, Brussels Airport has been focusing on improving the cool chain and pharma handling at Brussels Airport. Active in various industry bodies such as the Cool Chain Association (CCA) and the IATA Time and Temperature Task Force (IATA TTTF) Brussels Airport supports standardisation initiatives and promotes compliance to regulations and to international standards on a higher level for the benefit of the air cargo industry”, says Steven Polmans, Head of Cargo at Brussels Airport.

The objective of this program is to upgrade, align and standardize the pharma handling processes as well as to train industry stakeholders through the entire cool chain on and around the airport in order to improve the handling of pharmaceutical cargo with the objective to maintain the integrity of the product at all time.

“Today, more and more logistical service providers involved in air freight are looking at Good Distribution Practices (GDP) certification and meeting international standards”, confirms Nathan De Valck, managing this project at Brussels Airport. “But not all companies in the cargo chain can get a GDP license issued by the Belgian regulator. The legal responsibility of the regulator only covers part of the cargo chain. As a result of this limitation, GDP does not allow the airfreight industry to get a fully certified and a quality cool chain offering transparency and reliability to the shippers. Our project, – based on the GDP, offers to everybody in the logistical chain the opportunity to demonstrate that the standards and training needed to get such a certificate are met .”

The entire BRUcargo air freight community is invited to join the program, involving but not limited to airlines, handling agents, freight forwarders and truckers. Brussels Airport has worked on a common industry format for the auditing process in line with GDP and shipper requirements that will be used to assess all stakeholders in the cool chain. A checklist has

been developed in collaboration with and validated by the major Belgian pharma shippers. The Belgian regulator (FAGG) and Customs Administration will also have a voice in the assessment items.

A successful initial workshop was recently conducted bringing together representatives from the entire cool chain. Recommendations were made to further improve the program and arrangements were made to kick off the first assessments in the coming weeks. Initially, Brussels Airport will limit a first group of companies in the project to 10 participants. A second wave of audits and training can follow afterwards for the other interested companies. This will allow the BRUcargo based companies that do not meet the prequalification standards yet, to improve for example their infrastructure, internal processes, quality systems, so that they can join the program at a later stage. Phasing the project will also offer more flexibility to meet the planning requirements for the different trainings and audits that will be organised.

“The project is of course on a voluntary basis, nobody is compelled to join. Those companies happy with their current setup can just continue their day-to-day business”, adds Nathan De Valck “and for companies that are not yet meeting the requirement today, a additional investment besides the training and audit might be needed, depending on the gaps and the corresponding corrective actions that are identified during the assessment..”. The companies who are already GDP certified would obviously be in a good position to be certified.

“There will be a certain cost for the companies joining as they will need to follow some training and there is a rigorous audit involved. However by grouping different companies we would be able to reduce the cost. In the beginning of the project Brussels Airport will also carry part of this cost since we are convinced that this project will give a major boost to the pharma volumes at our airport”, Steven Polmans said. “The idea is obviously that more and more companies and airports will do the same in the future. It is only by creating a common standard in a very transparent way and a high level of quality handling that we can meet the requirements of the pharma shippers. And this will be part of what the air cargo industry needs to do to avoid further modal shifting to sea freight or other modes of transport. For this purpose, we are discussing our project in the different working groups we joined such as the IATA TTTF and the CCA. It is no coincidence that standardisation was high on the



agenda of the last CCA meeting held in Paris in April this year”, concludes Steven Polmans.

About Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport is one of the largest airports in Europe with 19.1 million passengers. Its cargo area BRUcargo handles 650,000 tonnes of freight annually. Brussels Airport links the European capital with 232 destinations worldwide that are served by 78 different airlines. (figures 2013).

Brussels Airport is dedicated to become the most European, most efficient and friendliest airport in Europe. Brussels Airport caters for the specific needs of the business travellers, and also has the largest low-fare offer in Belgium.

Brussels Airport is the second most important centre of economic growth in Belgium providing direct and indirect employment for 60,000 people.

Brussels Airport is operated by Brussels Airport Company. The shareholders are the Belgian State (25 percent) and a consortium of private investors (75 percent).

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