

STANDARDS AND HARMONIZATION

WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHAT IS NEXT?

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You want standards? Then get involved. To have effective standards, you need a community to build them, a community to use them and – crucially – a community that ensures those standards are harmonised. In short, standard is not a standard if no one uses it.

As the digital exchange of data continues to grow exponentially in the ports, shipping and logistics world and across many other facets of international trade, we are used to hearing claims that there is a lack of standards. We are also used to knocking down that argument. The maritime industry has been developing, refining and using international standards for many years.

NON-STANDARD STANDARDS

The challenge is this: as standards have developed, standards organizations have diverged and even those using the standards have adapted their standards of choice to meet their own needs.

In theory, customs manifesting may have the same standards. However, the supplier or generator of the manifest often adds additional information for their own needs, such as a purchase order or a customer reference number. The result is, of course, non-standard standards, as users take the basic standard and tweak it to suit themselves.

Therefore, when people say there are no standards and ports should have a single standard, we say – there are standards in ports and they are being used, but the problem is that users are not using them as planned or advised, but adapting them. Standards should be like a single language – change the grammar or the vocabulary,

and confusion can only be the result. The whole trade sector needs to work together to create more harmonisation.

SETTING THE SCENE

There are three main generators of standardised data models. Most of the industry is using United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)-based messaging as well as linking into World Customs Organization (WCO) data models. The third player is the International Standards Organization (ISO), which has multiple sets of internationally recognised standards. And there are others, too. The International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA), for example, has standards used for navigation, shipping and cargo. Also, there are some commercial standards for logistic purposes – for instance GS1, which develops and maintains global standards for business communication.

Another player is PROTECT. Set up in 1992 by major European ports to harmonise and optimise electronic information exchange by means of standardised messages legally required in ports, PROTECT expanded with support from Port Community Systems and other new members, and earned global recognition by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Facilitation (FAL) Committee and the shipping industry as a Message Design Group derived from UN/CEFACT activities. In 2019, PROTECT was integrated into the International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA), to combine two organizations with an unrivalled level of knowledge and

experience in standardised and harmonised electronic information exchange.

THE BUSINESS OF STANDARDS

In some instances, standards have, in effect, become a business; some standards organizations charge for the use of their standards, others charge a maintenance fee, others make their standards free. What you pay depends on what standards you use. For example, IT companies develop proprietary standards, which means you get tied into them. Another example of lack of harmonisation.

For what it's worth, we believe strongly that standards should be open and free.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The IMO set in motion some very specific work in collaboration with the WCO, UN/CEFACT and the ISO, in developing its own data reference model, or compendium, to define all the elements of the electronic FAL forms across WCO, UN/CEFACT and ISO.

In April 2019, the FAL Committee approved a revised and updated IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business, to support harmonisation and standardisation of electronic messages.

The Compendium will be used as the basis for automated and digital systems for exchange of information when ships arrive at and depart from ports. The information data set supports mandatory reporting formalities for ships, cargo and persons on board and can also be extended to support commercial businesses in international shipping.

The IMO defines it thus: "The IMO Compendium is a tool for software



developers that design the systems needed to support transmission, receipt, and response via electronic data exchange of information required for the arrival, stay, and departure of the ship, persons, and cargo to a port. By harmonizing the data elements required during a port call and by standardizing electronic messages, the IMO Compendium facilitates the exchange of information ship to shore and the interoperability of single windows, reducing the administrative burden for ships linked to formalities in ports.”

The IPCSA was one of the members of the working group which developed the Compendium, alongside members from Belgium, France, India, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Ukraine, Uruguay, United Arab Emirates and the United States, as well as the IMO

Secretariat, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and BIMCO.

In its next step, the IMO FAL Committee established an IMO Expert Group on Data Harmonisation (EGDH) – to meet twice a year and take care of the further development of the IMO Compendium, working towards harmonisation.

The EGDH, which met for the first time in November 2019, is responsible for the technical maintenance of the IMO Compendium and for further expanding its data set and data model to areas beyond the FAL Committee, including exchange of logistics and operational port and shipping data. This is one of the first examples of international organizations tackling the considerable challenge of harmonising standards, and IPCSA is honoured and proud to be playing a key role in its work.

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

As well as working to harmonise the IMO data reference model across WCO, UN/CEFACT and ISO, the EGDH’s work also means continually adding suitable new data standards – for example, relating to dangerous goods or stowaways – that can be agreed at international level.

A macabre example is this. If you have 100 persons ‘remaining on board’ but one dies, how many do you then have – 100 or 99? In some declarations and documentation, a deceased person is considered ‘goods’.

The ultimate prize is this: when a vessel arrives at a port in Asia, the master gets asked for the same information as in a port in Europe or Africa – regardless of which standards body is being used, because the information can be mapped across.



Is it standardisation or harmonisation that we need? IPCSA is clear on that question. There are standards but they are not harmonised. If they were harmonised, it would be easier for organizations across the world to implement them.

IPCSA has, from the start, been pushing for more trade organizations and more member states to be involved in this important work, because it is the basis for all electronic exchange of information. The EGDH was formed in 2019. It will take time but its work is already delivering results.

GET INVOLVED

Standards don't just happen; organizations must support them. Logistics organizations and others that say there are no international standards need to recognise that there are standards bodies and there are bodies developing standards and working on harmonisation. How many of these logistics organizations decide they are not interested in taking part in the process because (they think) 'it's someone else's job'?

It is up to everybody to get involved. That means finding out who your Member State's contact is at the IMO and being proactive. We are back to that word 'community'.

An excellent example is the work that the Digital Container Shipping Association (DCSA) is doing on standardised carrier information – work that includes mapping this to UN/CEFACT.

Another point is this. We tend to think mainly about business-to-business

standards while forgetting about business-to-government. Many governments use their own standards or those of the WCO. Shipping lines use their own standards. If there isn't harmonisation, the costs of mapping from one standard to another could be as high as if you were implementing a whole new message in the first place.

An example we have used before is 'port of arrival' or 'actual time of arrival'

(ATA). What does that actually mean? For a port authority, it's usually when the vessel enters port territory. For customs, it is when the vessel is actually alongside the quay. Not the same thing at all, and there's a significant time difference between the two. Inevitably, there will be costs involved in such discrepancies.

We need to mean what we say: and we need to all know what exactly that is.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

IPCSA is an international association of sea and air port community operators, sea and air port authorities and single window operators that is recognised across the globe for providing advice and guidance on the electronic exchange of information across borders and throughout the whole supply chain.

Formed in 2011 as a European association, IPCSA became an international association in 2014. The association currently has members from across the globe who handle the exchange of information for Business to Business, Government to Business and Government to Government processes and facilitate the smooth cross-border movement of goods. This equates to the electronic exchange of information in more than 250 seaports, airports and land border crossings, more than 500 million TEU movements

and over 10 billion tonnes of cargo for air, sea and land transport – estimated to be in excess of 20 million electronic messages and exchanges every day.

IPCSA focuses on supporting and facilitating systems and innovations for Port Community System members and users, and promoting the use of international data standards in sea and air ports, at border crossings and via Single Window systems around the world. IPCSA is a recognised NGO with consultative status at UNECOSOC and IMO.

ENQUIRIES

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