Strength in numbers: IPCSA and PROTECT finalise integration one year early - combining unrivalled expertise in electronic information exchange

The drive for global standards in electronic messaging at ports has been given a major boost with news from the International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA) that the standards specialist group PROTECT has now been fully integrated into the association, a year earlier than expected.

The move has consolidated, within one organisation, an unrivalled level of knowledge and experience in standardised and harmonised electronic information exchange; this renewed strength and focus will help to accelerate innovations and advances in the sector.

PROTECT was established in 1992 by six major ports in Europe, to harmonise and optimise electronic information exchange by means of standardised messages legally required in ports. The number of its participants subsequently grew, to include port authorities and Port Community System operators. PROTECT became a working group within IPCSA at the end of 2019.

"The full integration of PROTECT into IPCSA is a significant step forward in the area of electronic messaging standards," said Richard Morton, secretary general of IPCSA. "Despite difficult circumstances with COVID-19 during 2020, the transition of PROTECT proceeded smoothly. It was therefore decided by PROTECT members to fully integrate into IPCSA a year earlier than expected."

PROTECT's mission, vision, values and objectives will be reviewed and updated in the first part of 2021, said Hans Rook, chairman of IPCSA, who added: "We are delighted that PROTECT is now totally integrated into IPCSA. By combining the very considerable expertise of both groups, we will accelerate our work in

supporting international standards, including in the delivery of Just-In-Time [ship arrival] APIs and data through international standards bodies."

Although it started as an EU project, PROTECT is now recognised globally. It has responsibility for (amongst many) the development and maintenance of the IFTDGN dangerous goods notification message, the WASDIS waste disposal information message and the BERMAN berth services request message.

Membership of PROTECT is open to Port Community Systems, sea port authorities and Single Window operators that deal with maritime matters.

Jerome Besancenot, chairman of PROTECT, said: "PROTECT was formed to provide standardised EDI messages to facilitate trading between stakeholders and port authorities. The rapid acceleration of the digitalisation process in recent years has meant that we are also talking about issues such as European and international Maritime Single Window, blockchain, smart containers and the Internet of Things.

"There was already an overlap between PROTECT and IPCSA in terms of work and membership – in joining IPCSA, we recognised that by combining our strengths we could be highly influential in working with national, regional and international decision makers, including on the IMO's FAL group."

PROTECT considers and provides guidance on standards issues to international and regional bodies such as the European Commission; as part of the IPCSA family, it will also have a voice at the International Maritime Organization (IMO), said Richard Morton.

"PROTECT members, through IPCSA's delegation at the IMO, are now supporting the IMO in its Correspondence Groups and Working Groups, when it comes to matters of electronic messaging," he explained. "The full integration of PROTECT into IPCSA is a pivotal development in the field of standardised and harmonised electronic information exchange."

About IPCSA

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.

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.

The PROTECT Group, develops and supports the electronic reporting required by authorities for vessels entering or leaving a port or port area. It maintains and develops EDI through the PROTECT Guide. In January 2020 PROTECT integrated into IPCSA
www.protect-group.org

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