

ISSPA Update on IAEA Steering Committee On Denial of Shipments of Radioactive Material

From: Paul Gray; ISSPA Representative to and Deputy Chairman of
IAEA Steering Committee on Denial of Shipments

BACKGROUND:

Shipments of radioactive materials (RAM), and specifically those radioisotopes used for medical, industrial and public health applications, have sometimes experienced denials or significant delays in transportation. These denials may arise from outright refusal by a carrier (or by a partner where ships are co-shared) to transport the product, to limited routes available due to Port or cargo handler restrictions, to differences in regulations between countries (or even jurisdictions within a country).

Delays in transport are due to limited numbers of carriers willing and capable of carrying RAM, limited routes where all Ports along those routes are willing to allow and support transshipment through their Port, and inconsistent route plans which vary depending on the season (time of year).

ISSUE:

In the worst case, denials and delays preclude our industries' ability to ship products when we want and to the locations we want. This can result in customer dissatisfaction, lack of required material when it is needed, significantly increased transportation costs due to the need to ship on a more convoluted vs. direct route (to accommodate carrier/route/Port restrictions), or to a move by customers or potential customers towards competing technologies.

STATUS REPORT on ACTIONS UNDERWAY:

A number of activities are underway to both mitigate the root cause of denials and delays as well as to raise awareness amongst those governments, industry associations (e.g. Ports and Harbours, Vessel Owners, Cargo Handlers) and organizations which impact our ability to efficiently transport radioactive sources. Success from these actions will be seen in reduced denials and delays and, optimally, in facilitation of these shipments.

A brief summary of activities currently underway is highlighted below. Some of these actions will extend over the long term given that we are dealing with diplomatic and government process and change, however some are short term where we are working directly with those agencies and individuals who are on the front line processing our shipments.

1. UN

- i) IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency Steering Committee on Denials
 - The initial meeting of this Steering Committee was held in November 2006, with subsequent meetings planned for later this year
 - Membership includes regulators from multiple countries (global reach), industry association representatives, IAEA, International Maritime Organization (IMO), and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) such as International Association of Ports and Harbours, International Cargo Handlers, Vessel Owner's Hazardous Materials Association, International Air Transport Association (IATA), etc.
 - The denial issue arose formally within IAEA at the International Conference on Safety of Transport of Radioactive Material in July 2003 and culminated in the constitution of this Steering Committee (SC). The objective of the SC is to develop and coordinate a comprehensive action plan related to delays and denials of shipments of radioactive material at both national and international levels. Intent is that the action plan will involve concerned organizations (country regulators, carriers, Ports, other agencies and associations) and will increase awareness about the uses of radioactive materials and the safety standards developed by international organizations, with an end goal of facilitated shipments.

- ii) IMO (International Maritime Organization)
 - Denials/delays formally accepted by IMO as a key policy and practical issue
 - The IMO adopted, in December, 2005, an Assembly Resolution (highest level document within this UN body) dealing specifically with "Facilitation of the Carriage of IMDG Code Class 7 Radioactive Materials Including Those in Packaged Form Used in Medical or Public Health Applications". Arising from this Resolution was an action to develop a working process which the IMO would follow in identifying, investigating and resolving denials of shipments. This working process was developed and approved at the March, 2007 IMO meeting. IMO will be committing internal resources and reviewing results annually at the most senior levels of the IMO. The IMO and the IAEA will work closely in all aspects of this process.

- iii) UN Subcommittee of Experts on the Transportation of Dangerous Goods
 - This Committee evaluates and sets international standards relating to the transportation of dangerous goods. They are aware of the denial of shipment issue and have it identified as an agenda item for their June, 2007 meeting. The IAEA and some member States who are also involved with the IAEA and IMO activities noted above will be participating.

What is important in the actions noted above is that a number of UN agencies have taken a very specific and very direct interest in the denial of shipment issue. They have committed resources to deal with this problem and are using the UN process to integrate governments, international associations and other agencies to assist. Although the process is long term, it will help to deal with denials at the root cause level.

2. U.S. DHS/Customs and Border Protection

- Conducting education sessions at Ports (air, land, sea) regarding medical and industrial radioisotope uses, production, containers and the transportation process, safety and security. Sessions have been successful in raising awareness and helping to facilitate trans-border shipments
- Similar sessions have been held at training facilities for US Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection and Federal Law Enforcement personnel. These sessions have increased awareness and provided good contacts for dealing with specific denial issues. Such efforts have proven very beneficial.

3. Industry/Government Initiatives

- A joint US/Canada and industry/government council exists which is evaluating and investigating issues which impact the ability of the radioactive material industry to ship product within North America in an efficient and ongoing manner. A number of working groups have been created to investigate and work towards resolution of those issues which are adversely affecting this ability.
- Other industry associations are also looking into specific issues affecting transportation of that industry's specific products (e.g. nuclear medicine products and radiopharmaceuticals).

What is important in items 2 and 3 is that industry can directly and positively effect change and our ability to reduce the potential for denials and delays. This obviously is best done locally and with the specific organizations and individuals who directly influence the flow of product. In addition to raising awareness, this activity allows us to identify the decision makers, to identify policy and to identify those things which are important to the organization and individual, thereby providing a much more integrated and informed approach to the transportation of radioactive materials.

Ongoing effort will continue to be applied to these and other actions, as they arise, in an effort to improve our ability to transport our products globally without risk of denial or delay.

If additional detail is required regarding any of these initiatives, please contact the undersigned. Also, if you are experiencing denials, please forward details of the denial, the reasons given and the results of subsequent actions you have taken so that we can ensure the database is accurately populated.