



**AIRPORTS COUNCIL  
INTERNATIONAL**

**Ground Handling** | **Policy Paper**

**Version 1.0**  
**October 2016**

*Approved on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2016 by ACI WGB at its 54<sup>th</sup> meeting*

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACI considers ground handling to be of great importance to the safety, regularity, efficiency and performance of airport operations. Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs) play a key role in the operations of an airport, in particular through the handling of passengers, baggage and cargo, and, with the aircraft operators, are fundamental to maintaining the regularity and safety of airport operations.

Currently GHSPs are the only major stakeholder involved in the aviation system that is not regulated by international legislation or certified by State regulatory bodies. Yet every year a significant number of incidents and accidents related to ground handling activities are caused on airports around the world. Additionally, there is currently a lack of standardisation in the approach taken by airport operators regarding the licensing and safety oversight of ground handling activities on airports.

This policy paper consolidates ACI World's policies regarding ground handling activities. It is centralised around three different key policy areas:

- Certification of GHSPs by State regulatory bodies based on industry operational standards and recommendations.
- Provision of a licence or concession to GHSPs by airport operators for operating on the airport.
- Safety oversight of GHSPs airport safety relevant activities by airport operators.

The policies and recommendations to ACI members established in this Policy Paper aim to improve the safety and regularity of airport operations, in particular as regards ground handling activities.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The ACI World Governing Board, at its meeting on 30 August 2015, tasked the Safety and Technical Standing Committee (STSC) with the development of an ACI Policy Paper on the subject of ground handling. The STSC proceeded to set up an ad-hoc Ground Handling Working Group (GHWG) to deliver the task laid out by the board and develop a paper providing a consolidated ACI policy position on the subject of ground handling.

### 2.1 Importance of the topic

Ground handling activities on airports, in particular their safety and regularity, are of a particular importance to airport operators for a number of reasons, including the following points:

- There are significant numbers of aircraft damage and personal injury accidents, with consequent costs and delays to aircraft which may, in some cases, involve the airport's reputation;
- Airport operators generally have oversight responsibility over the safety of activities on the apron areas;
- The responsibilities and liabilities, between ground handling service providers, airport operators and airlines, are not always clearly established; and
- The performance, regularity and efficiency of ground handling operations have a direct impact on the overall performance of the airport operations and an airport's capacity.

### 2.2 Purpose of this policy paper

The main purpose of the ACI work on Ground Handling is to improve the safety and regularity of operations on airports. The policy positions laid out in this paper are all aimed at supporting this main purpose by providing on one hand guidance for ACI Members but also a consolidated set of policy positions that are held by the airport industry on the subject of ground handling.

### 2.3 Future regulation

The ICAO Ground Handling Task Force (GHTF) is currently (2015/2017) working on the development of an ICAO Manual on Ground Handling, which will include a section on Guidance to Aerodromes on how they might "regulate", "provide safety oversight" and "licence" Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs). In particular, ACI has been asked to contribute material to the GHTF and is actively working on drafting the texts, some of which may be extracted from this policy paper.

In addition, some national or regional Regulators are moving to require greater regulation, certification and oversight of ground handling activities. In this context, and as stated below, ACI recommends that the regulatory requirements applicable to GHSPs should be based on best practices and recommendations developed by industry bodies, including ACI, ASA and IATA.

### 2.4 Potential difficulties

The domain of ground handling is complex with a multitude of relationships, contracts and responsibilities shared or distributed across a host of actors. The GHSPs, the airports and the airlines all have a stake in the services provided around an aircraft, be they over the wing or under the wing services. In this context,

a number of potential difficulties have been identified that have to be taken into consideration regarding ACI's policy position on ground handling activities.

- Ground handling is a complex activity with multiple actors involved, often with different handlers offering different services on different parts of an airport and even different handlers conducting different services on the same aircraft turnaround;
- The ground handlers clients are the aircraft operators with whom they establish Service Level Agreements (SLA) and contracts, sometimes including “bonus” and “malus” clauses that can have a direct impact on the revenues of the GHSPs;
- The airport operator has direct control over certain aspects of the airport or operation that have a direct impact on the provision of ground handling service. For example, apron design, driving procedures, vehicle licensing, provision of fixed equipment, rental of real estate, permission to operate, etc.;
- The airport operator does not have direct control over some other aspects related to the provision of ground handling services on the airport. For example, operational ground handling procedures, performance levels set out in an SLA with the airline operator, the type of activities provided by the GHSP on behalf of the airline operator, labor laws, health and safety standards, etc.;

The combination of the points identified above inevitably creates “silos” between the different stakeholders, which does not lead an optimal result in terms of operations and will not allow for the improvement of safety and regularity of ground handling operations.

## 2.5 Applicability

The intention of this document is to provide ACI's consolidated position on ground handling activities taking place on its member's airports. The policies provided in this document are only applicable within the limits of the national or local jurisdictions and in no way oblige ACI's members to take specific actions.

The policy statements found in chapter 3 below are also to be included in the next update of ACI's Policy Handbook.

### 3. KEY POLICY STATEMENTS

The following key policy statements form the core of the ACI position on ground handling activities at airports. These three key topics are fundamental to providing a safe framework for the provision of ground handling services on an airport as well as ensuring the safety and regularity of airport operations. The policy statements provided below are briefly described in this section of the paper and are then further detailed in the corresponding subsequent sections.

#### 3.1 Certification

*Certification of GHSPs* should be carried out by State regulatory bodies based on industry operational standards and recommendations, developed and monitored by industry associations.

Different models for the certification of GHSPs may exist depending on the organisation of the GHSP and the regulatory framework that will be developed. These could include:

- *State certification* – a certification or licence provided by the National Aviation Authorities (NAA) of each State whereby the oversight activities are also conducted by the NAA.
- *Industry certification* – a certification or licence provided by recognised industry bodies (IATA ISAGO for example). In this case the oversight and continued compliance is conducted by the industry bodies or its representatives.

Although industry certifications already exist, ACI favours the implementation of a State Certification based on regulations, standards and certification processes developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders, such as ACI, IATA and ASA.

If a state certification process is not applicable or possible, a registration process with the regulator could be developed as an alternative means of oversight by the state. The registration would only be granted if the company could provide the necessary data/guarantees.

*For further information on certification of GHSPs see chapter 4.*

#### 3.2 Licensing

Airport operators should require each Ground Handling Service Provider to sign a license or concession agreement in order for it to operate on the airport.

The ground handling license or concession should detail and govern the relationship between the airport operator and the ground handling service provider and cover aspects such as safety, security and environmental oversight, responsibilities, liability, services provided, performance standards and cost recovery.

The airport operator should assess whether any restriction on the number of GHSPs is necessary for safety reasons, and permissible under local regulations.

*For further information on the licensing of GHSPs see chapter 5.*

### 3.3 Safety oversight

Ground handling service providers should develop and maintain a safety management system (SMS) that is commensurate to the scale and complexity of their operations on an airport and suitably coordinated with the airport operator's SMS.

The airport operator's SMS should monitor and provide safety oversight of activities and services conducted on the airport as defined in the ground handling license provided to the GHSP, taking into consideration the party specific capabilities and responsibilities relative to the services provided. ACI should provide guidance to airport operators on how to ensure coordination between both safety management systems as well as best practices in monitoring and enforcement of agreements to ensure compliance.

*For further information on the safety oversight of GHSPs see chapter 6.*

### 3.4 Additional Policy Considerations

In addition to the three key policy areas, a number of subsequent topics have been identified as being important to airport operators. These considerations include, but are not limited to:

1. Adoption of local aerodrome regulations: ensuring that local airport regulations, rules and procedures are adopted by ground handling service providers;
2. Relations with aircraft operators: ensuring the development of solid relations with aircraft operators in order to have improved communication between airports, aircraft operators and ground handling service providers, such that there is no conflict between the aircraft operator's requirements of the GHSP and the requirements on the GHSP in the airport license;
3. Operational performance: including GHSPs in the measurement of overall airport operational performance, with binding service level agreements with GHSPs to guarantee alignment with airport operator service level requirements e.g. (as defined in concession agreements)
4. Responsibility and liability: including allocation of responsibilities and liabilities between the airport operator, the aircraft operator and GHSPs; and
5. Cost recovery: Development of a cost recovery plan with ground handling service providers to recover costs for the provision of ground handling facilities.

#### 4. CERTIFICATION OF GROUND HANDLERS

Standards and recommendations pertaining to the certification of ground handling service providers should be developed and monitored by industry regulatory bodies.

Industry regulatory bodies should develop standards and recommendations requiring GHSPs to be certified against operational standards and recommendations. GHSPs should be certified by State regulatory bodies against these operational standards and recommendations, developed by industry associations, for the provision of ground handling services on airports.

##### 4.1 Industry collaboration

Currently a multitude of industry standards, best practices and recommendations are published by industry associations. These documents are developed based on the real world experience of the airport, aircraft operators and GHSP representatives who all play an active role in discussion and drafting the guidance material. Any future standards and recommendations, developed by international regulatory bodies, should be founded on existing best practices and recommendations provided by industry bodies such as ACI, IATA and ASA.

This collaboration across industry bodies is fundamental to ensuring a shared benefit for all parts of the civil aviation system and not just one or the other of the stakeholders. This is particularly important for the development of the ICAO Ground Handling Manual and any subsequent regulatory materials.

##### 4.2 Standards and recommendations

A number of topics should be addressed through the regulatory work conducted by ICAO and other Regulatory bodies (EASA for example). Two of the key topics that need to be addressed are:

- *Certification of GHSPs* – obligation for the certification of the GHSPs by State regulatory bodies, against operational standards and recommendations. This certification should be based on the same processes already existing for airports, aircraft operators and ANSPs. Any operational standards and recommendations should be based on existing industry best practices.
- *Obligation to have a Safety Management System* – obligation for a GHSP to have a Safety Management System (SMS) that is adequately coordinated with the aerodrome and aircraft operator's SMS (*see also section 6*).

Additional standards and recommendations should include:

- Provision of the necessary means to ensure safe delivery of ground services at the aerodrome such as: facilities, personnel, equipment and material, compliance with local aerodrome operator procedures, documentation of tasks, responsibilities and procedures, access to relevant data and record-keeping.
- Procedures and training for the movement of vehicles, equipment and persons in the movement area and other operational areas coordinated with movements of aircraft in order to avoid collisions and damage to aircraft.
- Procedures to mitigate risks related to aerodrome operations in all weather conditions day or night.
- Arrangements with other relevant organizations whose activities or products may have an effect on aircraft safety such as: aerodrome operator, apron management service providers, aircraft operators, air navigation service provider and other ground handling service providers.

- Implementation and maintenance of training, qualification and checking /auditing programs to ensure the continuing competence of all relevant personnel.
- Establishment of manuals containing all necessary instructions, information and procedures for the services provided, the management system and for service personnel to perform their duties.

### 4.3 Certification process

GHSPs should undergo a certification process similar to that currently conducted for aerodrome operators, aircraft operators, air navigation service providers and maintenance and repair organisations. This certification should be conducted by State regulatory bodies against the standards and recommendations set out by industry regulatory bodies but could also be based on existing industry practices such as the IATA ISAGO programme.

Different models for the certification of GHSPs may exist depending on the organisation of the GHSP and the regulatory framework that will be developed. These could include:

- *State certification* – a certification or licence provided by the National Aviation Authorities (NAA) of each State whereby the oversight activities are also conducted by the NAA.
- *Industry certification* – a certification or licence provided by recognised industry bodies (IATA ISAGO for example). In this case the oversight and continued compliance is conducted by the industry bodies or its representatives.

Although industry certifications already exist, ACI is in favor of the implementation of a State Certification based on regulations, standards and certification processes developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders. The goal of this approach should be a scalable performance based certification process implemented using existing and proven materials and methodologies and applicable to all GHSPs.

The development of a State Certification, based on the existing certifications used for airports, aircraft operators, ANSPs and MROs, will ensure that the same processes are applied globally the State regulators who act as a neutral certification body. Additionally, the State acts in a position of authority, as opposed to the other industry stakeholders, and does not have a vested commercial interest in the ground handling activities.

If a certification process is not applicable or possible, a formal registration process with the regulator must be defined and developed. The registration should ensure that a set of minimum requirements are met before start of operations of the GHSP at any airport. These minimum guarantees could include reporting of data, financial guarantees, insurance coverage, organization structure, responsibility of management, and so on).

**5. AIRPORTS AND GROUND HANDLING**

Airport operators should require each Ground Handling Service Provider to sign a license or concession agreement in order for it to operate on the airport.

The licence or concession agreement provided by the airport operator, is a binding legal agreement between the GHSP and the airport operator. The provision of a licence or concession to each GHSP operating on the aerodrome by the airport operator will ensure a formal relationship is established and allow for a clear definition of the scope, responsibilities, liabilities and specific operations required of the GHSP by the airport operator on the aerodrome. A description of the services provided by the GHSP for the aircraft operator need to be included in the airport operator’s licence documentation, in particular when these operations are relevant to the safety of airport ground operations. The specific handling activities and processes, such as baggage loading or passenger handling, do not need to be included as these are operations related to flight safety and not ground safety.

The airport operator should assess whether any restriction on the number of GHSPs is necessary for safety reasons, and permissible under local regulations.

The licence or concession provided to the GHSP by the airport operator should also contain a requirement for the GHSP to have a legal agreement with each aircraft operator they service. This agreement should as a minimum establish the scope of activities, the responsibilities and the allocation of liabilities between the two parties.

**5.1 Provision of service**

The provision of ground handling activities can vary widely on different airports based on local history, the market access, requirements set out by the airlines, airport or even in some cases the State. Different models, or combinations thereof, exist as listed in the table below:

Aircraft Operator self-handling	The aircraft operator provides its own handling operations through its own ground staff and equipment. These operations may cover the full range of services required or may include a portion of subcontracted activities.
Airport handling services	The airport operator provides a range of handling services on the aerodrome for the aircraft operators. These services may cover all or part of the operations needed by the aircraft operators.
Third party handling	One or more third party handling companies provide all or some of the services required by the aircraft operator on the aerodrome. The third party may carry out these operations directly or indirectly through sub-contracting.

Various combinations of the above models for the provision of services can be applied on individual aerodromes.

## 5.2 Concession and/or licenses

In order to provide a strong legal framework in which the relationship between the airport operator and any third party or aircraft operator self-handling service providers is established, the aerodrome operator should provide a concession or licence agreement to the other party.

This Ground Handling Licence (term adopted throughout this document), should be established in such a way as to clearly establish the elements governing the relationship between the airport and the GHSP. It should take into consideration and may include all or a subset of the core items listed in point 6.5 below.

A ground handling licence will be established for varying periods depending on the local rules for tendering or specific user requirements.

## 5.3 Contractual relationships

A typical licence agreement will embody conditions that contribute towards improving safety, security and regularity of operations whilst ensuring quality services are provided to aircraft operators by the GHSP in an equitable, sustainable and competitive environment.

In principle, the airport operator's main concern regarding ground handling services, is ensuring that passengers are provided with high quality services and that the airport functions are maintained safely, securely and efficiently.

Within the licence, the airport operator should also specify minimum quality standards as well as set terms and conditions for the use of its facilities, coordination of operations and provision of services while maintaining high levels of safety and security. In many cases, the agreement between the GHSP and aircraft operator will also include service level and performance provisions, care should be taken not to create conflicting requirements for the GHSP.

Aircraft operators, who are the actual users of the ground handling services on an aerodrome, are not party to the licence agreement between the GHSP and the airport operator. Aircraft operators are obliged to use the GHSPs to whom the airport operator has provided a licence to operate.

In some cases, self-handling agreements are typically entered into by a local aircraft operator at the airport and will be determined by the airport's internal policies for the provision of ground handling services. In the case where an aircraft operator provides self-handling, the terms and conditions contained in the licence provided by the airport operator should be the same as those provided to third party handlers. Considerations on granting self-handling arrangements should be guided by issues relating to airside congestion, space constraints, ability to perform the functions effectively and adverse competition with existing third party handlers.

## 5.4 Tendering process

Most jurisdictions provide for an open, fair, and transparent tender process to select a ground handler. The EU Directive on ground handling (*Council Directive 96/67/EC*) specifies that selection criteria must be relevant, objective, transparent and non-discriminatory.

One problem confronting airport operators is the number of ground handlers and the selection process or adjudication criteria for awarding available licenses. Safety and quality of service is paramount whereas price cannot be considered since the airport does not pay for the services provided.

Given that aircraft operators have a major stake in the services provided by the GHSP on the aerodrome, the airport operator should choose to involve aircraft operators to participate in any tendering and/or selection process established. This involvement can be done individually with major aircraft operators (hub carriers or major operators) or through representation from aircraft operator committees that may exist at the airport – the Airline Operators Committee (AOC) to take a collective viewpoint, not just the interests of one organisation.

Once a GHSP has been selected, the airport, as a decision maker in the licence process, is neither party to nor has direct involvement in contracting the service delivery between the aircraft operators and ground handlers.

Possible adjudication criteria for the tendering process could include:

- Years of experience on a similar airport
- Financial strength
- Insurance liability cover
- Commitment to comply with safety, security and environmental rules and regulations
- Commitment to meet service standards
- Equipment resourcing plan
- Staff allocation plan
- Training plan
- References from existing clients
- Commitments from perspective clients
- Establishment of Safety Management System (SMS)
- Business development plan
- ISAGO or other certification
- Incident / accident record

## **5.5 Ground Handling licence considerations**

The following items are provided as a list of points to be considered when establishing a Ground Handling Licence Agreement with a GHSP. This list is neither exhaustive nor prioritized and has been included in this document to serve as guidance or a form of “check list” for airport operators.

### **5.5.1 Liabilities and responsibilities**

The licence agreement must clearly establish the responsibilities and liabilities of both the aerodrome operator and the GHSP. In principle, the airport should limit its obligations to the following:

- Provision of access to all areas necessary to properly conduct its business
- Informing the ground handler of any changes in local rules and regulations
- Provision of premises and facilities for use by the GHSP, subject to suitable commercial agreements
- Provision of operational information i.e. flight delays, changes to infrastructure, etc.

In this same context, the airport may exclude certain ground handling activities (such as VIP services or bus operations) through the licence if these are organized and performed by the airport operator.

### 5.5.2 Obligations of ground handler

The obligations of the ground handler should be clearly established in the licence document including general and operational obligations such as:

- Obligation to comply with local Airport Rules and Regulations
- Insurance requirements sufficient to cover any losses to aircraft or infrastructure. Insurance requirements to be determined on consultation with airport insurance broker
- Indemnities for any loss or damage
- Obligation to have a legal agreement in place with every aircraft operator prior to services being rendered, with such agreement at a minimum addressing issues of liability between the parties
- Obligation to ensure indemnity against industrial action
- Duty to report accidents and incidents, as part of the SMS
- Obligation not to withhold services
- Obligation to participate in relevant local safety, performance and quality committees or processes
- Emergency response participation

### 5.5.3 Penalties

The airport operator should consider the establishment of rewards and/or penalties which may be useful in ensuring compliance with the licence conditions. These could be limited due to there being no monetary exchange between the parties, however, concession fees could be used if applicable.

Provisions may also be inserted relating to penalties for certain violations of the terms of the agreement, for example under performance of services established in the SLA between the airport operator and GHSP. Introduction of a Bonus/Malus system for service and safety delivery is a proven method to incentivize GHSPs to meet service level agreements (which should include targets for both safety and operational efficiency).

### 5.5.4 Service levels and quality of service

As part of its overall operational performance scheme, the airport operator must determine the quality of service it wishes to achieve for the performance of key processes at the airport, which could include key performance areas related to:

- Turnaround and departure punctuality
- Check-in processing and queue times
- First and last bag delivery
- Baggage delivery to aircraft
- Availability and duration of bussing (if applicable)
- Boarding and de-boarding times

The selected indicators should be included in a Service Level Agreement that is integrated into the ground handling licence agreement, preferably as an annexe so it can be updated more regularly without having to re-sign an entire agreement.

### 5.5.5 Performance monitoring

The operational performance, in regards to the Service Level Agreement established in the licence agreement, should be regularly monitored by the airport operator. Any deviations should be communicated to the GHSP and along with actions required to ensure compliance with the agreed service levels.

In addition, performance in other areas, such as safety, security, environmental protection should be monitored by the airport operator if applicable frameworks and local regulations are established.

The GHSP should participate in regular performance meetings with the airport operator during which the performance of the entire airport operation is reviewed.

### 5.5.6 Rules for ground service equipment

Given the large numbers of vehicles and equipment that GHSPs use on an aerodrome, the airport operator should consider the establishment of rules pertaining to the admission and safety of vehicles and equipment on the aerodrome. These rules may include the following:

- Valid permitting or authorisation from airport operator
- Environmental requirements, i.e. emissions, fuel types
- Quantity to meet operational demands
- Age of equipment
- Servicing intervals
- Compliance with IATA recommendations, AHM 900
- Checks of safety critical vehicle components

Additional guidance on the development of rules and regulations for equipment and vehicle access and operation on an aerodrome can be found in the *2010 ACI Airside Safety Handbook* and the *2015 ACI Apron Safety Handbook*.

### 5.5.7 Training

The airport operator should require that all GHSP personnel receive initial and regular refresher training on applicable airport rules and regulations as well as basic safety training pertaining to the operations on an airport's apron, including the use of PPE as defined in the airport operator's rules and regulations or national workplace safety regulations. The GHSP should keep detailed training records for all its personnel.

In addition, GHSP personnel must be suitably trained and qualified to operate the facilities and equipment, such as jet-bridges and fixed ground power, made available by the airport operator.

Specific training for driving on airside as well as training on vehicles and equipment used by ground handlers should be mandatory.

### 5.5.8 Cost recovery

The airport operator should consider the development of a cost recovery plan with GHSPs with the aim of recovering costs for the management of the GSP licensing program and for the provision of ground handling facilities and equipment (jet bridges, ground power, air conditioning, etc.). Cost Recovery could include the following elements: Charges linked to the use of infrastructure, charges linked to production (recovery per passenger), and minimum annual guaranteed recovery fees. In addition, the license agreement should include clauses allowing the airport operator to recover any costs incurred as a result of loss or damage to property as well as for rehabilitation of the infrastructure in the event of damage.

### **5.5.9 Security Compliance**

As regards security, when applicable, an obligation to comply with all national, local or airport security regulations should be included in the ground handling licence agreement.

### **5.5.10 Environmental Compliance**

GHSPs should be encouraged to engage in eco-friendly practices such as operating vehicles with low carbon emissions or provide group transportation on the apron rather than individual vehicles. In addition, all new vehicles should be compliant with the most recent environmental requirements or specifications, as applicable in the local regulations.

### **5.5.11 Scope of services provided**

The scope of the services that are permitted to be provided by the GHSP should be clearly identified and described in the license agreement. Any local “special” operations or procedures should also be described to ensure that the scope of operation is absolutely clear to both the airport operator and the GHSP.

A good reference document for the scope of services is the IATA Airport Handling Manual 810.

### **5.5.12 Adherence to government and local airport regulations**

A-catch-all clause requiring adherence to all applicable government and local airport regulations should be included in the licence agreement. Adding some specific references may also be necessary in some cases, for example this may be relevant in respect to Occupational Health and Safety and alignment with SMS.

### **5.5.13 Participation in A-CDM**

In the case where an airport is using A-CDM, the GHSP should provide the airport operator with real time and up to date data to be fed into the A-CDM tool. If the GHSP does not own the data, coordination or an agreement with the aircraft operator may be needed to allow for the data to be provided. This will improve efficiencies at the airport and reduce aircraft delays.

### **5.5.14 Airport Operations Centre**

If the airport operator has established a consolidated Airport Operations Centre (APOC), the GHSP may be required to deploy a senior staff member to be permanently located within the management/operations centre with ability and competence to make decisions of an operational nature on behalf of the GHSP.

### **5.5.15 Subcontracting**

Subcontracting of services by a GHSP should in principle not be permitted unless a prior written agreement is given by the airport operator. Any subcontractors have the obligation to abide by the same rules as the GHSP for whom the licence agreement has been issued.

### **5.5.16 Temporary labour**

Some jurisdictions have strict rules about employment of temporary labour. GHSPs should ensure compliance with any national or local regulations in this regards.

### **5.5.17 Insurance Requirements**

The GHSP should be adequately insured to perform the services and tasks required by the licence agreement and to cover the costs of damages to aircraft, equipment and infrastructure as well as any harm caused to staff or passengers. The GHSP should provide the airport operator with a copy of the established insurance policy as well as notify it of any insurance claims made. It is advisable for the airport operator to seek legal counsel to review its policies on insurance for GHSPs operating under license at the airport.

## 6. SAFETY OF GROUND HANDLING

Ground handling service providers should develop and maintain a safety management system (SMS) that is commensurate to the scale and complexity of their operations on an airport and suitably coordinated with the airport operator's SMS

The GHSP and airport operator should ensure close coordination between their respective safety management systems in order to improve the safety of operations on the aerodrome. The GHSPs SMS should be part of the certification basis for the certification of the GHSP by the State as well as a requirement of the license provided by the airport operator.

The SMS established by the GHSP may be applicable on one or all airports where they operate. In some cases, they may develop an SMS for the entire company which will apply everywhere they operate. However, locally the company SMS should be coordinated with the airport SMS and follow the conditions of the licence.

### 6.1 Mandatory SMS

The provision of ground handling services can vary widely from one aerodrome to another, not only in terms of the types of organisation providing services but also the scope of the services provided. No matter what the set-up is and the scope of services, any organisation providing handling services on an aerodrome should have a SMS in place that is commensurate with the scale and complexity of the operations concerned.

Where handling is conducted by the aerodrome operator or by the aircraft operator, the SMS functions already existing within these organisations should cover the ground handling services provided. However, in other cases, in particular when third parties provide ground handling, a specific SMS should be developed by the service provider.

In all cases, as a minimum, the following items need to be covered by the SMS:

- A formal mechanism establishing the ground handler's obligations in relation with the Airport Authority's SMS (tools such as licensing or applicable policies or procedures could be used for that purpose);
- Mandatory SMS related training;
- The Safety Policy
- The name and contacts of the Accountable Manager and Safety Manager
- Hazard, incident and accident reporting
- Accident and incident investigation policies and procedures
- Safety risk management (including risk identification and mitigation) ;
- Safety assurance (including safety performance indicators, monitoring and improvement mechanisms);
- Safety reporting and data collecting/sharing;
- Safety promotion activities.

The specific elements constituting the SMS may vary on a case by case basis depending on the scale, scope and complexity of the GHSPs operation on the aerodrome. However, in all cases the principles established in existing industry materials related to SMS should be observed.

## 6.2 Safety Oversight by Airports

In order to offer oversight over the safety of ground handling activities on the aerodrome, the airport operator's SMS should monitor and provide safety oversight of activities and services conducted as defined in the ground handling licence provided to the GHSP, taking into consideration the parties' specific capabilities and responsibilities relative to the services provided. The airport operator does not need to conduct oversight on the specific procedures and activities that are carried out by the GHSP but should rather only monitor activities with relevance to the safety of airport operations and compliance with the provisions established in the licence agreement.

The oversight provided by the airport operator should include spot checks and audits of specific portions of the GHSPs operations as defined in the ground handling licence provided by the airport operator. Any observations or findings identified during an audit or spot check should be duly reported to the GHSP and action requested and followed-up upon to ensure safety.

In the case where the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has set up a regulatory framework providing oversight of the ground handling services, the oversight should be conducted directly by the CAA. However, any reports or findings should be communicated to the airport operator so as to be able to follow-up with any safety improvements or changes necessary.

Given that a significant number of the GHSPs services are provided on behalf of the airline operator, it is not uncommon that an airline will conduct oversight over the flight safety relevant portions of the GHSPs operation. In as much as possible, these audits should be coordinated with the airport operator or at a minimum any relevant observations or findings associated with the airport's responsibilities, identified by the airline during the audit, should be provided to the airport operator to allow for action to be taken.

## 6.3 Coordination of SMS

In an environment where a multitude of operators, each with their own safety management system, it is vitally important for safety and efficiency that operations be closely coordinated among all stakeholders.

No matter what the operational arrangement or organisational set-up of the GHSP on the aerodrome, processes should be in place between the organisations providing handling services and the aerodrome operator in regards to the SMS. These procedures should include but not be limited to:

- Exchange, sharing and analysis of safety data (reports, statistics, etc.).
- Provision of joint safety promotion activities (posters, campaigns, videos, etc.)
- Production of joint safety assessments of changes (in particular if multiple organisations are affected by the change)
- Participation in joint Safety Workgroups and Commissions of the aerodrome (Ramp/Apron Safety Committee, Safety Oversight Committee, SMS Committee etc.)

The ACI Safety Management Systems Handbook, published in 2016, provides guidance on the development of an SMS as well as the processes necessary for coordination of SMS between multiple stakeholders.

#### **6.4 Liability and responsibility**

In some jurisdictions the airport operator can be considered liable for an accident or incident if safety oversight is conducted by the airport operator. For this reason, particular attention needs to be paid to the liability and responsibility of the airport operator in regards to ground handling activities on the aerodrome.

The licence provided to the GHSP should clearly specify the liabilities and responsibilities of the service provider, and any subcontractors, for all activities conducted on the aerodrome. In the same context, the specific liabilities as regards safety oversight and safety management should be explicitly stated in the licence documentation.

- END -