

IATA Press Release

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Low Density Cargo

The Special Composite Cargo Conference held in Lisbon 11 - 12 March 2005 reviewed the status of the May 2002 proposal to revise the Low Density Cargo industry standard from 6000cc per kg to 5000cc per kg. This proposal reflected the need for the air cargo industry to adapt this old standard to the changing nature of cargo in order to transport cargo more efficiently.

This proposed amendment has not come into effect because a number of the necessary government and regulatory approvals remain outstanding. The Conference believed that this long delay was now causing some confusion within the cargo industry.

Subsequent to the meeting in Lisbon, the full Conference membership has been consulted and a resolution has been adopted on 21 March 2005 to withdraw the proposed amendment to this important industry standard. This change will come into effect once the necessary government and regulatory approvals have been obtained.

Notes for editors:

- The so called "Resolution 502" - one of many standards in air cargo - concerns a procedure for determining a shipment's cubic volume, and establishes a definition for 'low-density' cargo.
- Unlike other means of transport such as sea, rail and road, the size or odd shape of an air cargo shipment is often more important than its weight. The space available in the cargo hold must be used as efficiently as possible to accommodate the baggage of all passengers as well as cargo.
- The airlines had proposed to update their definition allowing them to carry more cargo more efficiently. Aircraft performance has improved significantly in the 20 years since this standard was last changed - with more powerful engines able to lift more weight, while the space available in the cargo on hold has remained static. Many flights 'cube-out', meaning that all the available cubic volume is filled long before the maximum weight limit is reached.
- The types and overall nature of air cargo have also changed. In the past, air cargo contained heavy machinery and similar commodities and these have been replaced by high- technology products such as computers, software, videos, CDs, DVDs, computer games, mobile phones and other electronic equipment. Virtually none of these products existed when the first Boeing 747 entered service over 32 years ago. These goods are typically lighter, but are higher in value than most items traditionally shipped by air in the past. Protective packaging now uses lightweight but more voluminous materials such as polystyrene.
- The intention behind the proposed changes was to incite improvements in the efficiency of packaging methods to reduce the volume of their shipments using more compact and environmentally friendly packaging. This would allow airlines to increase capacity with only a marginal increase in operating costs. Increasing capacity without adding flights is environmentally sound and benefits both shippers and agents/forwarders.