

FIFA SURVEYOR ACCREDITATION SCHEME

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Abstract

Imported fertilizer itself poses no quarantine risk; however, there is a risk if cargoes are contaminated by foreign organic matter such as seeds or grains. To ensure compliance to Australian Quarantine Inspection Services (AQIS) requirements, the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia, Inc.(FIFA) established a number of procedures designed to minimise, if not eliminate the risk of contamination. These measures have proved effective in significantly reducing the number of quarantine incidents in fertilizer imports. They include a standard ship inspection procedure prior to loading, including the use of high lift equipment, conducted by FIFA approved surveyors.

FIFA now has the opportunity to further improve its processes through the implementation of a Compliance Agreement with AQIS. An integral part of the Agreement will be formal accreditation of ship inspection surveyors. The purpose of accreditation is to ensure a consistent standard among all surveyors irrespective of their location, nationality or workload.

Background

FIFA's Import Logistics Committee was established in 1996 to address what had rapidly become the most critical issue for the fertilizer industry, that of Quarantine compliance.

Whilst Fertilizer itself poses no quarantine risk, contamination by foreign organic contaminants could. It was for this reason that AQIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service) increased its inspection regime on imported fertilizer.

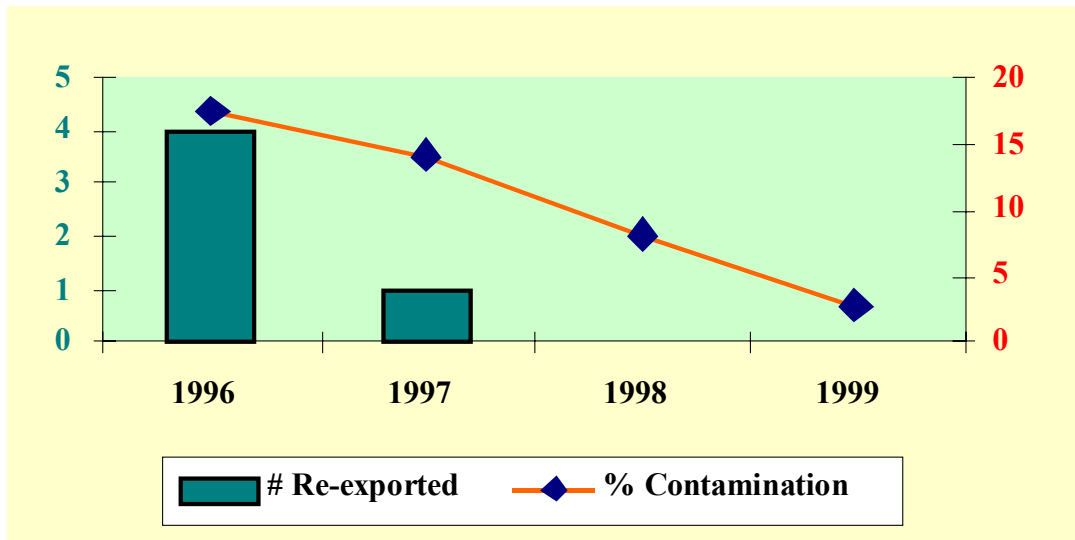
The cost of non-conformance is high with over \$30 million dollars worth of cargoes required to be re-exported over the past five years.

To ensure compliance to AQIS requirements, FIFA's Import logistics Committee established a number of procedures designed to minimise, if not eliminate the risk of contamination. These include:

- Standard ship inspection procedures including the use of high lift equipment
- Standard audit checklists for inspection of supplier's supply chain from factory to loading port
- Common ship selection process
- Discharge equipment inspection guidelines
- Use of FIFA selected surveyors for ship inspection
- International Surveyor's conference to improve awareness of quarantine issues.

These measures have proved effective in significantly reducing the number of quarantine incidents in fertilizer imports. This is clearly highlighted by the results you see in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Quarantine Incidents in Fertilizer Imports



FIFA now has the opportunity to further improve its processes and its relationship with AQIS through implementation of a Compliance Agreement as outlined earlier by Hart Krttschil.

Surveyors

An integral part of the Compliance Agreement will be accreditation of our ship inspection surveyors. So what do we know about them?

FIFA members import fertilizers from all parts of the world including North America, South America, Asia, Middle East, North Africa, South Africa and Europe. In all there are 22 ports at which FIFA members loaded fertilizer during 2000. At each of those ports, FIFA members employ a Surveyor to inspect the ship prior to loading to ensure it is clean, free of previous cargo and suitable to carry fertilizer on its voyage to Australia. Mostly the Surveyors are local to the port with some only seeing Australian fertilizer ships three or four times per year. In between times, Surveyors may work for ship owners, insurance companies, other charterers, or product suppliers to perform any, or all, of the following functions:

- Vessel cleanliness inspections
- Product quality assessment
- Assess damage for insurance claims
- Determine quantity loaded
- Audit compliance of Ship Management Systems
- Sample product as loaded

The surveyor is the last person to see the ship and the cargo before the ship arrives in Australia. In effect, they are our eyes and ears at the load port. It is essential, therefore, that the surveyor fully understands the special needs of importing fertilizer in Australia despite the fact that other customers do not have the same rigorous needs.

Accreditation

The purpose of accreditation is to ensure a consistent approach by all our surveyors irrespective of their location, nationality or workload. The accreditation process will need to deal with a number of key issues. I will briefly outline each of these areas in turn.

1. Surveyor Selection

FIFA will establish a set of selection criteria for use in choosing which Surveyors will be acceptable for consideration as FIFA accredited Surveyors. This will deal with qualifications and/or experience, track record and work references.

2. Training

Training modules will be established to develop the Surveyor's understanding of FIFA and AQIS requirements as well as the physical inspection procedure. Some of this training may be remote (e.g. via Internet) and others may be on-the-job training by an accredited Surveyor.

3. Procedures

FIFA has already developed detailed inspection procedures for the inspection of fertilizer ships. These form the basic framework for FIFA ship inspections and it will be required that accredited Surveyors follow these procedures during inspections as is current practice.

4. Testing

Surveyors will be required to undergo some form of testing to ensure they have adequate understanding of the principles set out in the training as well as a working knowledge of the procedures necessary to perform their tasks. This may be a mix of classroom or on-line testing as well as on-the-job assessment.

5. Maintaining Accreditation

FIFA will establish criteria that Surveyors must meet to maintain their accreditation. This will include past performance and frequency of performing FIFA survey's as a minimum.

6. Managing Non-conformance

Whilst the accreditation process is designed to ensure conformance, it is important to have a system to manage non-conformance should it occur. FIFA will establish clear criteria for conformance. Non-conformance will be dealt with in a consistent manner with the ramifications well defined and understood by the surveyors as well as AQIS.

7. Accreditation Register

FIFA will maintain a register of accredited surveyors including date of accreditation and requirements to maintain accreditation. This register will be available to all FIFA members for use in selecting Surveyors to perform ship inspections. When FIFA members load at ports not serviced by Accredited Surveyors, they will need to relocate one of the Accredited Surveyors for ship inspection until such time as a local surveyor can be accredited.

8. Auditing

FIFA's Surveyor accreditation system will be designed in such a way that it can be audited on a routine basis. Auditing may be performed by FIFA members or external parties. Auditing will ensure the processes put in place are robust and deliver the desired result of compliance to AQIS requirements.

Advantages to the Industry

By establishing a surveyor accreditation system, FIFA members benefit in a number of ways:

- It provides ready access to a pool of trained and experienced Surveyors for ship inspections
- Delivers a consistent approach to ship inspection
- Delivers a higher level of compliance to AQIS and FIFA requirements
- It will be essential in the development of a Compliance Agreement with AQIS
- Provides an auditable process which ensures consistency and enables continuous improvement.

Advantages for Surveyors

Surveyors also benefit from an accreditation system in the following ways:

- Formal recognition for a role they already perform
- Some additional training
- Clarity of FIFA and AQIS expectations
- A network of colleagues to communicate with on surveying practices

Next Steps

FIFA's Import Logistics Committee has already established a group to develop the accreditation process and work has begun. In addition, work has commenced with the AICCC in utilising examples from other industries (including some training modules) to fast track the work FIFA has started.

AQIS involvement will be sought through the AICCC Industry Working Group as well as through the development of the Compliance Agreement.

As the accreditation program develops, input will be sought from key Surveyors used by FIFA before establishing a trial and ultimately fully implement accreditation.

Conclusion

FIFA has made significant improvements in the way it manages quarantine risk associated with importation of fertilizer. Through a Compliance Agreement, FIFA seeks to formalise the procedures we have put in place with AQIS in order to reduce the overall cost of compliance.

One important aspect of a Compliance Agreement will be a formal Surveyor Accreditation Scheme which FIFA is in the process of developing.