

Welcome to TT Talk, No. 83 in the series.

Contents:

1. Container owners to meet in Antwerp
2. Chartered Institute of Logistics launches HELP
3. Beware of unmarked "police" cars
4. Holiday closures in Hong Kong and Shanghai
5. The quarter-million dollar barbecue
6. Conclusion

1, Container owners to meet in Antwerp

The Container Owners Association was established in November 2004 as an international organisation representing the common interests of all owners of freight containers.

The principal aims of the organisation are to provide global expertise, to promote common standards and to facilitate international lobbying. The association is also intended to enhance co-operation between its members and other associated industry bodies in a number of fields. Full Membership of the COA is open to all owners of freight containers whose primary business is container operation and leasing.

The next meeting of the association will be in Antwerp, Belgium on 22 and 23 June with a cocktail reception for participants on Wednesday evening 21 June in the historic Stadthuis.

This year is the fiftieth anniversary of Malcolm McLean's first container shipment on board the converted tanker Ideal X from Port Newark to Houston. The COA will celebrate this half-century, with a gala dinner in Antwerp on 22 June.

Full details of the conference and the dinner can be obtained from the COA's website <http://www.containerownersassociation.org/>

The COA is mindful of the fact that even container owners may have higher things on their mind in late June and have therefore taken great care to schedule both the reception and the dinner to avoid clashes with matches in the football World Cup.

2. Chartered Institute of Logistics launches HELP

The last sixteen months have seen an almost unprecedented series of natural disasters - the south Asian tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and the various hurricanes in the Caribbean and Mexican gulf are just a few that spring to mind. Each has brought misery and suffering to the local population, with the urgent need for relief supplies and longer-term requirements for rebuilding.

The response from the global village to such disasters is overwhelming, but the challenges faced by the teams in the disaster area are equally enormous. Vast quantities of aid are flown in by governments, charities or private individuals but those on the ground are faced with the logistical nightmare of distributing that aid to the areas where it is most needed when the transport infrastructure, tenuous at the best of times, has been wrecked or rendered impassable by the disaster. In these circumstances, logistics is truly a matter of life or death: get it wrong and thousands will die of exposure, hunger or illness. Get it right and many of those people will survive.

The dedicated work undertaken by volunteers is indeed heroic but it is also true to say that, after the event, many of them will say "we could have done better". Yet, each time a disaster strikes, individuals

and companies often report that they offered practical help but could find no-one who knew how to use their particular expertise.

In the summer of 2005, the UK Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) was one of a number of interested organisations that attended a workshop on the role of logistics in disaster relief. From that sprang a working group, comprising representatives of the military, commercial businesses, the voluntary sector and professional organisations. Feedback from those with experience in disaster relief was unequivocal: the group could best help by working to improve the professionalism of the people who carry out humanitarian logistics, and by raising the professional status of logisticians and transport managers within the relief organisations.

As a result, CILT (UK) has formed Humanitarian & Logistics Professionals (HELP), whose primary objective is to save lives and reduce suffering. One of its key areas is the HELP register, a database of experienced, qualified and specialised individuals who are able to respond to a crisis and deliver excellent humanitarian logistics, as well as collecting information about businesses and other organisations that have spare capacity in their logistics and transport resources, or who can provide specific skills and staff at short notice, or who can provide humanitarian and emergency logistics.

Further details of the HELP programme, offers of assistance and other information can be obtained from the group leader, Bernard Auton. He can be contacted by email at bernard.auton@ciltuk.org.uk.

3. Beware of unmarked police cars

Truckpol, the UK's collaborative undertaking between police and private industry formed to combat vehicle crime, reports that in the early hours of a recent Sunday morning a lorry driver was travelling on a major highway in the south of England when he noticed a dark blue saloon car alongside him. The car was showing a flashing blue light on the dashboard and a flashing "Police Stop" sign in the rear window. The lorry driver followed the car into a lay-by and stopped behind it. Three men got out, asked the driver about his load, forced him to open his rear doors and then badly assaulted him before getting back into their car and driving away. Nothing was stolen on this occasion.

A Metropolitan Police spokesman said, "It is extremely rare for an unmarked police car to want to stop a lorry, particularly in the early hours of the morning. I would advise drivers to be very careful about stopping for unmarked cars in these circumstances. If the police want you to pull over, there is no reason why they should not use a fully marked vehicle with uniformed officers to do so. If you are unsure, call the office, keep going but stick to the speed limits. If you do stop, lock the doors, make a note of the registration number of the car, leave your engine running and be prepared to drive away if you genuinely believe you are being robbed."

While police practice in other countries may be different, this warning underlines the message to drivers to exercise extreme caution if any attempt is made to stop their vehicle by an unmarked "police" car.

4. Holiday closures in Hong Kong and Shanghai

In line with other businesses in China, the Club office in Shanghai will be closed for the May Day holidays from 1 May until 7 May. Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 April will, however, be normal working days in the People's Republic.

The office in Hong Kong will be closed on 1 and 5 May (two days only).

Club offices in other countries where May Day is a legal holiday will also be closed on that day.

5. The quarter-million dollar barbecue

News reaches us to show how, once again, two mildly hazardous actions only need the chance of a small additional incident to have disastrous consequences. The Viennese newspaper Der Standard reports that a citizen of the small Austrian town of Traiskirchen decided to have a barbecue to celebrate the Easter weekend, and invited friends and neighbours round to enjoy grilled sausages and cold beers in her back garden. All was going well, until a stray spark from the barbecue set the garden hut alight. The heat eventually caused an oxygen cylinder, stored inside, to explode. Miraculously, only two guests needed hospitalisation and the hostess herself was treated for shock, but sixteen houses, four cars, a bicycle and, of course, the garden hut were damaged by the blast, with total costs estimated at around USD 250,000.

6. Conclusion

We hope that you will have found the above items interesting. If you would like to have further information about any of them, or have any comments you would like to make, please email the editor at tt.talk@ttclub.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

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