



Sustainable Cabin: Cabin Waste and Single Use Plastics (SUP)

Fact Sheet

The airline sector faces challenges associated with improved cabin waste performance and the replacement of single use plastics (SUP) products with sustainable alternatives. The sector has been criticized for the lack of reuse and recycling of its cabin products and, although the pandemic slowed the growth in cabin waste volumes, the lack of smart regulation will continue to constrain airline efforts to improve the sustainability of cabin operations.

Cabin Waste

Background

The airline sector has been criticized for the lack of reuse and recycling of its cabin products and, although the pandemic slowed the growth in cabin waste volumes, the lack of smart regulation will continue to constrain airline efforts to improve performance.

All cabin waste is subject to national waste management controls that limit pollution, but many countries have gone further with their regulations, introducing restrictions on catering waste from international flights to protect their agricultural sector (in respect to animal health). These restrictive requirements preclude the reuse and recycling of airline meals and cabin products from international flights.

Airlines and their catering providers have an opportunity to reduce cabin wastes by improving planning and logistics. Cabin waste audits undertaken by IATA and number of airlines indicates that **20-25%** of cabin waste is untouched food and beverages and although the inflight catering market shrank during the pandemic this still means the sector is incinerating or landfilling **US \$2-3 billion** worth of resources. The regulations reduce the sector's ability to help build a circular economy and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to cut global food waste in half by 2030. Airlines and their service providers must work collaboratively with regulators to ensure that aviation makes a positive contribution to this SDG target.

IATA Activities

- IATA's activities related to cabin waste and single use plastics (SUP) are led by the Sustainability and Environment Advisory Council (SEAC). SEAC has formed a Sustainable Cabin Working Group that aims to identify and review cabin waste and SUP issues as well as emerging legislation and technology, and provide a platform for airlines to share best practices and advice on areas that require technical support, research or regulatory engagement.
- A major obstacle to airlines' ability to reuse and recycle more cabin waste is the International Catering Waste (ICW) legislation that many governments have adopted. These regulations aim to reduce the risk of transferring animal and plant diseases by requiring ICW to be subject to special treatment. IATA commissioned a study to understand the risks posed by airline catering waste on animal health. It advocates the adoption of smarter regulation which allows reuse / recycling while maintaining animal health controls.
- IATA has published a [cabin waste handbook](#) that promotes a holistic approach to cabin waste management, with a focus on waste minimization, reuse and recycling. The handbook identifies 23 actions that could be initiated by airlines, manufacturers and service providers to improve waste performance. It aims to drive technology development and uptake and supporting service contracts that promote waste minimization and recycling, and ultimately leads to the adoption of long-term sustainable solutions.
- IATA's guidance on cabin waste management during the pandemic was incorporated into the CAPSCA (Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation) recommendations for amendments to the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) guidance. The aim of IATA's guidance was to

ensure that authorities adopt a risk-based approach with only waste associated with passengers and crew that exhibit COVID-19 symptoms deemed biohazardous.

- IATA is coordinating its activities with other aviation associations including the Airline Catering Association (ACA), International Flight Services Association (IFSA) and the Aviation Sustainability Forum (ASF).

More info: www.iata.org/cabin-waste

SUP

Background

The inappropriate disposal of SUP and its impact on the marine environment is a key challenge. Although SUP is widely used in aviation due to its strength, lightness and hygienic properties, voluntary action by airlines has demonstrated that the sector is keen to replace these products with more sustainable alternatives.

However, international airlines are facing challenges with differing SUP regulations being implemented at airport, regional and national levels. Asymmetric SUP regulations will result in differing alternative products being introduced on separate legs of a journey, confusing passengers and crew, increasing compliance costs and generating more waste.

These emerging regulations do not recognize that alternatives to SUP must meet strict aviation security and hygiene constraints and that replacement should be based on a lifecycle approach that takes emissions from flight operations into account. IATA has also identified asymmetric national SUP bans that are problematic for international airlines, and we are raising awareness of these concerns with the relevant regulators. Many airlines have taken a proactive approach to the challenge of SUP by removing straws and drink stirrers and introducing bio-based cutlery, crockery and packaging solutions. However, these initiatives have stalled or been reversed as a result of the pandemic and the introduction of asymmetric regulations.

IATA Activities

- The SUP Working Group has prepared guidance on the harmonization of SUP regulations.
- In early June 2022, IATA was one of 26 experts invited to participate in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ad hoc open-ended working group meeting dialogues to prepare for the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) developing a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution
- The Director of the Economy Division (UNEP) has presented a keynote speech on the proposed plastic treaty at the World Air Transport Summit (WATS) on 21 June 2022 in Doha, Qatar.