Cabin Waste and Single Use Plastics (SUP) Fact Sheet

Background

The airline sector has been criticized for the lack of reuse and recycling of its cabin products and, although the pandemic has 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. This has been recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a specific target to cut global food waste per capita 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. The number and scope of regulations placing restrictions on single-use plastics (SUP) has increased significantly in-line with public interest and are aimed at addressing the problems of harmful marine litter.

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 drinks stirrers and introducing bio-based cutlery, crockery and packaging solutions. However, these initiatives have stalled or been reversed as a result of the pandemic. Airlines are observing more plastics in the cabin including discarded personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizer bottles and wipes and many regulators are insisting that food and drink offerings are pre-packaged.

IATA Activities

- IATA’s activities related to cabin waste are led by the Sustainability and Environment Advisory Council (SEAC) and include identifying and reviewing cabin waste issues, emerging legislation and technology, and providing a platform for airlines to share best practices and advising on areas that require technical support, research or regulatory engagement.
- In October 2020, SEAC established a Single Use Plastics (SUP) Working Group with a focus on preparing guidance on the harmonization of SUP regulations and sustainable alternatives to SUP.
- 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 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 serves as a guidance document for airlines, manufacturers and service providers – driving 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 has been incorporated into the CAPSCA (Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation) recommendations for amendments to ICAO Council’s Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) guidance. This will assist with ensuring that regulatory authorities align their pandemic flight standard operating procedures with that issued by IATA. The aim of IATA’s guidance is to ensure that authorities adopt a risk-based approach with only waste associated with passengers and crew that exhibit COVID-19 symptoms deemed biohazardous.

More info: [www.iata.org/cabin-waste](http://www.iata.org/cabin-waste)