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Safety First

Remember the predictions of how email, video conferencing and the other now commonplace means of communication, would erode the need for so much air travel? I also remember how airlines created various loyalty programs targeted at maintaining their share of the business traveler market as promises of reduced travel for employees was just on the horizon. OK, so how well did you do in reducing your travel?

If you're like me, you will know the value of face-to-face communication and how it can be the real difference between securing that deal and letting your competitor get the win. For most of us in the business world, air travel remains a fundamental part of our lives and so I pay my fare and get that next red-eye to wherever. But in doing so, there is one thing that I have always just taken for granted – that whoever I am flying with will always put my personal safety above anything else.

And that's not just about the flight safety announcement and whether I am seated near an exit. As someone involved in the global logistics and air cargo sector, I am keenly interested in what's in that cargo hold under my feet. Even more so now since, like many others, I have heard and seen the tragic crashes of air cargo aircraft that seem to have been caused by fires from overheating cargos. Whilst more aircraft manufacturers incorporate extensive fire safety systems into the airplanes, dealing with a fire at 40,000 feet remains an undeniable challenge.

In the daily international distribution of those valuable life-science healthcare products that need temperature control, air cargo is an essential part of the supply chain process. And so with it has been the development of specialized containers that can maintain internal temperatures whatever the outside environment might be – either the heat of a Memphis ramp area in July or a Moscow airport in January. These containers inevitably use sophisticated technologies and have self-contained power sources to ensure end-to-end temperature assurance. And that means electrical compressors, cooling fans and a whole lot of other onboard electronic systems, all of which generate heat.

So who regulates the manufacturers of these containers and checks that they are safe to be onboard that passenger plane I might be sitting on? Who makes sure that if, heaven forbid, there was a fire in flight, that the container with all its equipment won't make things worse? Thankfully, there are saviors at hand.

Since 1958, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been at the forefront of flight safety and is globally recognized as probably the world's leading authority on the subject. Together, with other organizations around the globe, most notably the European Aviation Safety Agency (formed 10

years ago), they have the responsibility of approving a wide range of cargo equipment - and that includes the active electrical containers that many of us in the pharma logistics sector know well.

To gain the 'seal' of approval from the FAA in terms of certification is an exacting task for any equipment manufacturer, involving a very lengthy process of safety and performance submission testing and data, and supplier and manufacturer inspection. The testing and the process are costly and takes much time, but isn't that worth ensuring things are safe? (It's certainly what makes me feel comfortable).

To be sure of being able to fly these electrical containers on the world's leading USA and European airlines, and therefore creating an uninterrupted global distribution network for life science companies, requires the approval of both the FAA and EASA. Right now, only one supplier - CSafe Global - has the approval of both authorities for an RKN electrical container and this is because of its highly sophisticated smoke detection system. The design incorporated into this aircraft unit load device (ULD) means that it immediately shuts down the external fans on the container should it detect any form of smoke from a potential fire within the aircraft cargo hold. The FAA saw this as an essential component of ensuring that the smoke detection system of the aircraft was not impacted nor that there was any effect on the all important fire suppression system used onboard aircraft.

The immediate significance of this is that no US registered air carrier is permitted by the FAA to fly an 'unapproved' container. Additionally, and since many of the world's other airline regulatory authorities use the FAA guidance as the framework to regulate their national carriers, there has been an immediate withdrawal by two international carriers from using the electrical container from their European based supplier, since that container does not have FAA approval.

Why could this be important to a life science manufacturer? Manufacturers spend a lot of time and money on risk mitigation to ensure that there is contingency planning in raw material supply, manufacturing and distribution. This includes items such as ensuring there are multiple sources for key raw materials, having the capability to produce key products at multiple plants and having several transportation lane options qualified.

Many will know this is part of Good Distribution Practice (GDP) - identifying where potential risks in the supply chain might occur and having a contingency plan in place. It's a subject we teach in-depth at our training courses and it's clear that shippers needing the security of end-to-end temperature management should be applying the same methodology. Using the FAA and EASA approved alternative solution from CSafe might just be the contingency you need.

For more information on the CSafe air cargo container please visit our website www.CSafeGlobal.com