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ISOPA Position Paper on Driver Shortage

The chemical logistics industry is confronted with a serious shortage of truck drivers. This driver shortage has a structural nature knowing that the average age of existing truck drivers is going up because young truck drivers are no longer attracted to the chemical driver job with its special requirements and obligations. Every year more drivers retire than new drivers join.

In August 2020, Cefic and ECTA, the European Chemical Transport Association, published a new best practice guideline with practical recommendations on how to tackle these driver shortage problems. Because of low engagement from most chemical shippers to act upon these recommendations, the situation has only gotten worse especially now with the Ukraine crisis.

ISOPA, the European Diisocyanates and Polyols Producers Association, concludes that the chemical loading and unloading processes for road transport are broken. Today, about 30% of the chemical shipments exceed a residence time of 3 hours, whereby the residence time is defined as the time difference between truck arrival and truck departure at a specific (un)loading place and includes the time before gate arrival. More specifically, this means that truck drivers get confronted with longer, unreliable waiting times at sites, which becomes the main reasons to quit the driver job. This trend is worsening day by day and can no longer be resolved through waiting time demurrages. If no immediate actions are taken, the supply of chemicals will be disrupted even further. Not only do unnecessary waiting hours impact the drivers' productivity, but they also have a negative safety, health and environmental effect.

To envision what such supply chain disruption could mean for the chemical industry, we refer to the 2021 Brexit example where a lack of drivers interrupted the delivery of products, like fuels to fuel stations and food to supermarkets.

The "over-optimization" at loading and unloading sites over the past years has happened at the expense of increased driver flexibility. This one-sided process optimization approach is no longer sustainable when it comes to the truck drivers' productivity and job attractiveness. Assuming we can eliminate the current lost driver time, we can retain chemical truck drivers more easily and increase the capacity of chemical drivers by 10%. We should also realize that the chemical driver shortage is worsened by the heavy demands on the labor market. Such driver demands like e-commerce drivers have less strict requirements and do offer a better work-life balance.

Given the above, it is time for change and immediate action to overcome the broken loading and unloading processes.

ISOPA recommended areas of opportunities are:

- Adapt site inventory level requirements

- Revise opening hours at loading/unloading sites

- Take responsibility for outsourcing of site operations

- Create slot booking flexibility

- Handle drivers with more respect

- Support initiatives for digital gate registration

Location: Brussels - Address**:** Rue Belliard 65 - 1040 Brussels - **Phone:** 0032 2 786 35 53

E-Mail: main@isopa.org - **Internet:** www.isopa.org - **Twitter:** @polyurethanes4U - **LinkedIn:** ISOPA

ISOPA reaches out to all stakeholders to join forces to improve the truck driver job attractiveness and productivity. We all need to ensure that chemical truck drivers are treated with respect and are considered as a very valuable resource to transport chemicals in a sustainable and efficient way.

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For more information, please contact:

Brieuc Lits – ISOPA - Communication Officer - brieuc.lits@isopa.org - +32484145687

ISOPA represents major European manufacturers of aromatic diisocyanates and polyols, the main raw materials used to make polyurethanes. More information on diisocyanates, their applications and ISOPA's product stewardship initiatives can be found on the ISOPA website.