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Attractive option

Top benefits of ISO tank containers for chemical hauling

INTERMODAL transportation is a hot topic these days as chemical shippers look for ways to reduce costs, carbon footprint and freight safety concerns, according to a recent blog posting from ChemLogix LLC, a third-party provider of comprehensive chemical industry logistics management and technology services. The 3PL discussed how tank containers can benefit chemical shippers.

When considering the merits of intermodal transportation, chemical shippers should also consider the benefits offered by ISO tank containers associated with this mode of transportation. While tank trucks still dominate over-the-road transport of liquid chemical freight, ISO tank containers are becoming more widely used as shippers convert to intermodal to transport freight through a combination of truck, rail and sea, according to the ChemLogix blog post.

The following are major benefits that ISO tank containers offer over over-the-road tank trucks in the transport of freight:

Greener. The International Tank Container Organisation reported that intermodal tank containers leave a carbon footprint that is almost 50% less than that of an equivalent drummed shipment on certain long-haul routes. Using intermodal transportation also saves fuel and reduces CO2 emissions by up to 70%, especially on hauls over 950 miles. This may be a major factor to consider as chemical shippers must find ways to reduce carbon footprint to meet future government mandates.

Safer. On long hauls, over-the-road tank trucks often must travel through bad weather, encountering unsafe driving conditions that lead to accidents and delays, according to the ChemLogix blog post. Vehicles often must park at unsecured rest stops and have the potential for mechanical breakdowns. Shipping freight via intermodal using ISO tank containers eliminates these issues. As containers are marked with a unique BIC code, they can be easily identified and tracked. And even heavy ISO tank containers are unlikely to cause mechanical failure on trains and ships and are safer when in transit.

Cheaper. Using ISO tank containers via intermodal as a mode of transportation instead of over-the-road tank trucks can help save 20% to 30% in transportation costs, depending on distance and volume of freight, ChemLogix officials contend.

Easy Storage. While ISO tank containers can easily be stored at the consignee, over-the-road tank trucks often must be returned to their point of origin, which for long-



hauls may be thousands of miles away. Delivering an ISO tank via intermodal to a consignee is generally a local delivery. No driver layovers are required.

Greater Flexibility. If the customer decides at the last minute to delay freight delivery for a couple of days, tank containers can be left at a local storage yard. If the load came via truck, the customer would have to take delivery on the scheduled date, according to the ChemLogix blog post. Also, as previously noted, one container can transport the same freight by ship, truck, and train as part of a single journey without being transloaded from one vehicle to another.

Managing chemical shipments is becoming easier for

ChemLogix customers regardless of transportation mode. Shippers can even use cell phones to track shipments anywhere in the world.

Mobile applications for iPhone/iPad and other devices are emerging in ways that can finally close or reduce many of the information gaps between transportation planning, the Shipping/Receiving dock, your customers, and even accounts payable, according to ChemLogix officials. Such applications are enabling shippers to: interface directly and more effectively with logistic partners; access logistics information in non-traditional business settings; and enhance communications where access to a computer is not readily available.

A Sterling (now IBM) Transportation Management System (TMS) Carrier Mobile App already available for the Apple iPhone/iPad gives carriers the ability to communicate directly with a shipper's TMS, even from the cab of their truck, to respond to shipment tender requests and to report shipment status in real-time.

For one ChemLogix client, this is especially important when it comes to communicating with smaller carriers that do not have electronic data interchange systems, including for those owner/operators whose dispatch offices ride in the passenger seats of their tractors. Trained on the iPhone application, these carriers now are able to immediately respond to tender requests, and once booked on a load to provide pickup, delivery, and estimated-time-of-arrival status updates.

"Tying these information feeds directly into their TMS system our client is now more frequently using its number one carriers, and has gained a better picture of in-transit

inventory status from pickup to delivery," ChemLogix officials say. "It's a win-win situation as carriers are able to respond to tender requests in real time, while on the other side shippers are able to provide enhanced communications to customers for improved service, and they receive fewer surprise calls from customers asking where their shipments are."

The iPad and other emerging tablet devices create additional opportunities to bring transportation information quickly and easily to its point of greatest impact. TMS mobile applications currently in development will enable sales reps to retrieve real-time reports and updates on shipment delivery performance.

"Rather than rely on last month's performance reports, sales reps will access the latest data on delivery stats for loads while buying a coffee at Starbucks on their way into a client meeting," ChemLogix officials say. "A week-old performance report showing 99% on-time delivery means nothing to the client if three shipments in the past two days were late or missed. Nothing ruins a sales call faster than bad surprises."

At the plant, on the loading dock, at the guard shack, or in the cab of the truck moving trailers to the dock for loading, iPad/tablet applications will provide real time information and process feedback from workers regarding shipping and receiving appointments, trailer assignments, and guard shack-monitored in-gate/out-gate dates/times.

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