Guidance on ports’ response to the coronavirus pandemic

Foreword

The operation of ports is of vital importance to face the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Ports ensure that the world’s medical supplies, food, fuel and raw materials, as well as manufactured goods and components vital to the preservation of employment, continue to reach their intended destinations.

In the spirit of international collaboration that drives the World Ports Sustainability Program, this guidance document is meant to help ports worldwide face the challenge, by providing a menu of options based on best practices from ports worldwide.

The goal is to provide support for the implementation of actions to prepare and alleviate coronavirus-related contingencies for port terminals and other maritime trade players. In addition, the actions could foster open collaboration to mitigate the pandemic.

The guidance document is updated based on contributions by ports worldwide and under the supervision of a dedicated WPSP Taskforce.

This edition of the Guidance on ports’ response to the coronavirus pandemic is structured along a four-layered approach, to present a methodology and a range of good practices regarding 1) immediate measures addressing port operations, governance and communication, 2) measures to protect the business and financial returns, 3) measures to support customers, stakeholders and community, and 4) measures for getting back to work.

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1. Immediate measures addressing port operations, governance and communication

1.1 Port Operations

Based on the observed international best practices, it is important to act quickly in order to prevent the spreading of the virus, with a focus on the health and safety of the port community while maintaining the port operational. The prioritization of essential port activities should be considered to ensure the spreading of the virus, with a focus on the health and safety of the port community while maintaining operations.

- All ports are assigning home office for administrative workers but find themselves in different stages of implementation. IT and telecommunications infrastructure limitations posed challenges for some partners. The remote work authorization regime has its particularities and varies per port. Some ports have assigned home office to their entire administrative workforce while others have dealt with the matter on a case-by-case basis.
- Some ports have established a secondary port office, relocating to it a small number of their employees, to minimize disruption in case of a potential quarantined office due to confirmed COVID-19 cases. If such case emerges, the secondary office will take-on all major business roles.
- Nearly all ports are prohibiting domestic and international travel, institutional visits and face-to-face meetings, with only very specific exceptions.
- Otherwise, ports are largely operating as normal, with allowance for the required/advised social distancing, use of masks and the longer shift changeovers times, due to both social distancing and need for cleaning equipment and operational vehicles (STS cranes, vans, side and front loaders) between uses. In several ports, the terminals have reorganized their work in order to allow for the sanitization of vehicles and equipment used by workers before each shift change.
- The organization of operational teams varies basically according to port size and type of cargo handled. Some ports have not made changes to their operational workforce, although they have implemented protocols to protect their workers prior to starting and during their daily activities. Most ports have been operating with a rotation system after forming teams A and B, who do not meet each other physically. These teams generally alternate on a weekly basis. In larger organizations, there are examples of reducing the number of people working in shifts A and B to create a standby C team. There is also more external example of ports that operate with teams A and B while team C is composed of a pool of multidisciplinary professionals who can move through different operational areas.
- To ensure cargo operations, facilitate the creation of operational stand-by teams and/or minimize contagion risks, some ports have ceased non-essential services in order to prioritize and guarantee the continuity of their core port activities (maritime access, docking and cargo operations). There are cases of increased flexibility in port operations, such as the expansion of the bunker area into an unoiling area and minimizing the need for docking.
- Most cruise ship operations have been interrupted. Only a small number of ports worldwide authorize the docking of cruise ships for humanitarian assistance.
- In locations handling containers, a “fast lane” has been created to prioritize medical cargo throughout the entire port logistics chain — including prioritization of the ship in the line-up, availability of pilots and tugboats, cargo handling, access to trucks, and authorization for vehicles to move forward. This procedure has been extended to different types of cargo in view of urgent demands to respond to the pandemic. The creation of a “fast lane” for medical cargo and essential services (oil production, fuel handling, etc.) is a measure of great importance for the containment of the pandemic.
- Regarding the treatment of ships with suspected or actual contamination cases, ports have been following the decisions of health authorities in each region. In addition, some pro-active, voluntary actions have been identified, such as the designation of dedicated berths (when possible) and implementation of quarantine areas on land for treatment. The protocols for treating suspected COVID-19 cases and vessels' quarantine procedures should avoid the risk that critical berths are effectively taken out of service by quarantined vessels.
- Ports are running their operations while being supported by the authorities as they recognize their fundamental role in the logistics chain and in mitigating the coronavirus' impacts. In line with the findings of the IAPH-WPSP Port Economic Impact Barometer reports, the vast majority of ports have not reported significant impacts on cargo operations. Exceptions do occur, notably because of some restrictions of land transportation. Some ports have proactively implemented specific procedures for truck drivers, which consists of checking their body temperature, facilitating identification and access, and establishing social distancing guidelines.
- Carriers also implemented preventative measures aiming to reduce the exposure to risk at ports and at terminals, such as the temporary suspension of crew changes and prohibiting crews from disembarking at port terminals.
- On the nautical side of things, some ports experience an increased number of vessels at anchorage. This comes as the result of either lack of business (e.g. container trade), or due to limited available storage capacity ashore (e.g. due to the increased demand for fuel and provision). In response, ports need to formulate and proactively communicate their policies on the use of anchorage areas in line with meteorological conditions.

1.2 Port Governance

Implementing specific governance systems to mitigate the crisis and organizing strategic dialogues with public authorities establish the foundation for effective actions to combat the pandemic. Collaboration and communication are key elements towards a rapid and efficient response.

- Different levels of governance organization are being implemented. Most ports have started up crisis committees to monitor the crisis’ developments and propose mitigation guidelines. Thanks to previously established emergency control plans, some ports have been able to develop more elaborate structures, including thematic subcommittees, such as financial and social responsibility committees.
- Some ports are interacting institutionally and regionally while focusing on strategic dialogue with government stakeholders through professional sector associations. The vast majority of ports are devoting much attention to communication and dialogue with priority stakeholders, by maintaining daily contact with clients, terminals, government agencies and the port community (with special attention to pilots and tugboat crews).
- Many of the emergency measures introduced by governments to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 are necessarily implemented quickly and with limited consultation. It is particularly important that port authorities maintain close dialogue with the appropriate governmental bodies to ensure that no measures that might inadvertently impact upon port activities are introduced.
- In few cases, city authorities have given additional duties to the port executive director to assist in delivering critical health care and emergency supplies. In these cases, ports are officially assigned to manage the logistics side of the pandemic crisis.

1.3 Communication

Throughout all stages of crisis management, rapid, transparent and proactive communication with all relevant stakeholders is essential to preserve reputation as well as to ensure business continuity.

- As seen in a wide variety of the ports, it is highly recommended to create a transparent, agile and pro-active methodology to communicate with the various internal and external stakeholders. The efforts should go towards providing clear information of the status of the operations, the immediate contact with clients, terminals, government agencies and the port community members, and, towards enhancing continuous community engagement as well as fostering dialogue. A wide variety of communication tools can be used for this purpose.
- Managing the risk perception of the different stakeholders is also key to avoid tensions and undesired situations. Clear and transparent communication on safety procedures, availability and use of protective gear by port employees can assist towards that direction.
- In structuring clear communication efforts for the business continuity stage of the COVID pandemic crisis, it is crucial to maintain transparency, high-level performance and integrity. Strategy can be based on the following drivers: 1) deliver information to all stakeholders with transparency, 2) guarantee safety of all, and 3) keep business up and running.
- To maximize the efficiency of communication, it is important to branch the messages according to the key stakeholders’ groups with the right communications tools. The following infographics offer a three-layered guidance on developing a communication strategy.
1. IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND INFORMATION NEEDS

1. INTERNAL
   - EXECUTIVE LEVEL
   - MANAGEMENT
   - OFFICE PERSONNEL
   - TEAM LEADERS*
   - DOCKWORKERS & STEVEDORES*
   - UNION REPRESENTATIVES*

2. EXTERNAL
   - PORT USERS (TERMINAL OPERATORS)
   - PILOTS
   - DREDGING OPERATORS
   - SHIPOWNERS, OWNER-OPERATORS, SHIP MANAGEMENT COMPANIES
   - SHIPS CREW
   - SHIP AGENCIES, OWNER REPRESENTATIVES*
   - PORT AGENCIES
   - SHIP SUPPLIERS (BUNKERS, PROVISIONS, CHANDLERS)
   - SURVEYORS

3. INSTITUTIONAL
   - PORT STATE CONTROL
   - EMERGENCY SERVICES (ESPECIALLY HEALTH AUTHORITIES)
   - CUSTOMS
   - MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES
   - REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
   - NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

4. PUBLIC
   - COMMUNITY INTEREST AND PRESSURE GROUPS
   - PUBLIC

* Possible external

Identification of your potential stakeholders:

- WAREHOUSE AND INLAND TERMINAL OPERATORS
- FORWARDERS
- CARGO OWNERS
- TRUCK OWNERS
- RAIL OPERATORS
- BARGE OWNER-OPERATORS

2. KEY MESSAGES PER STAKEHOLDER GROUP

1. HEALTH AND SAFETY (TANGIBLE PROOF POINTS FOR EACH)
   I. PRIORITIZATION OF SAFETY
   II. PRIORITIZATION OF HEALTH (PHYSICAL)
   III. PRIORITIZATION OF WELFARE/WELLBEING (NON-PHYSICAL)

2. OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY (CARGO LOAD/UNLOAD/TRANS-SHIP/ PASSENGER TRANSIT)
   I. WHAT REMAINS OPERATIONAL (HOW, WHO, WHAT, WHERE)
   II. WHAT IS PROHIBITED DUE TO HEALTH/SAFETY/WELFARE DIRECTIVES
   III. WHAT HAS BEEN CHANGED TO ENSURE CONTINUITY AND TRUE IMPACT (NEW REGULATIONS, NEW PROCESSES, DELAYS, RESTRICTIONS, CONGESTION)

3. COMMERCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTINUITY
   I. WHICH PORT SERVICES REMAIN AVAILABLE (HOW, WHO, WHAT, WHERE)
   II. WHICH PORT SERVICES ARE REDUCED, LIMITED OR UNAVAILABLE
   III. WHAT HAS BEEN CHANGED TO ENSURE CONTINUITY AND TRUE IMPACT

4. ACCESSIBILITY
   I. WHICH AREAS IN THE PORT REMAIN ACCESSIBLE
   II. WHICH AREAS IN THE PORT HAVE BEEN QUARANTINED/CLOSED
   III. WHAT ARE THE CARGO STORAGE CAPACITY UTILIZATION LEVELS (QUAYSIDE, REEFER PLUGS, INDOOR WAREHOUSING CAPACITY, HYDROCARBON AND CHEMICAL TANKER STORAGE)
   IV. INTERMODAL CONNECTIVITY LEVELS (ROAD, RAIL, BARGE, AIR, SHIP-TO-SHIP)
   V. PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY

5. TRANSPORTATION AND ANCILLARY SERVICES
   I. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AVAILABILITY TO AND FROM PORT AREA
   II. PUBLIC ACCESS TO PORT-OPERATED SERVICES AND FACILITIES

3. IDENTIFICATION OF OPTIMAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS

1. DIGITAL
   I. BUSINESS DATA COLLABORATION TOOLS (MICROSOFT TEAMS, WEBEX, SLACK)
   II. REMOTE CONFERENCING (GOOGLE MEET, ZOOM, WHEREBY, SKYPE FOR BUSINESS)
   III. SOCIAL COLLABORATION TOOLS (YAMMER, CHATTER, JIVE)
   IV. MOBILE APPLICATIONS (WHATSAPP, MESSENGER, LINKEDIN, TWITTER, FACEBOOK)

2. ELECTRONIC
   I. WEBSITE/INTRANET
   II. EMAIL MESSAGING
   III. DOCUMENTS AND ADVISORIES (PDFS, NEWSLETTERS, PAGETURNERS, PRESENTATIONS)

3. AUDIOVISUAL
   I. RECORDED AND LIVE WEBINARS
   II. RECORDED AND BROADCASTED AUDIOVISUALS
   III. CHANNELS (YOUTUBE, VIMEO)

4. EXTERNAL CHANNELS
   I. SECTOR PRESS
   II. REGIONAL PRESS
   III. NATIONAL PRESS
   IV. INTERNATIONAL PRESS
   V. TELEVISION AND RADIO CHANNELS (TERRESTIAL AND SATELLITE)
   VI. BLOGGERS/VLOGGERS/INFLUENCERS

5. PUBLIC CHANNELS
   I. DEDICATED ONLINE PORTAL/ FORUM/ VIRTUAL TOWN HALL MEETINGS

SINGLE EXERCISE PER STAKEHOLDER

1. What are their interests and what information do they need to continue to function effectively during the COVID-19 contagion?
2. What are the three most efficient methods for the messages to reach them?
3. How frequently do they need to be informed?
2. Measures to protect the business and financial returns

Several financial reports issued worldwide point to a downward trend in projected world GDP growth, which will be reflected in a disruption of cargo flows. Business in general will be impacted in all sectors and should gather tools to mitigate the financial consequences. The port sector can navigate these changes not only by bracing for the impacts, but also looking for opportunities raised by the new cargo flows.

- A good initiative to prepare actions is to model scenarios and the exposure of the port business model to the impact of changing cargo volumes as well as other revenues.
- Asses the financial risk based on the classical tools: identify, categorize probability and impact, allocate to modeled scenarios, such as "Level 1 – Minimum Impact, Level 2 – Severe Impact and Level 3 – Liquidity Crisis". Suggested parameters:
  - Level 1: (i) changes in cargo flows or port calls; (ii) slight decline in revenue and (iii) Manageable disruption in operations.
  - Level 2: (i) shut down of terminals and operations; (ii) land-lease revenue impact; (iii) cargo handling revenue impact; (iv) severe impact to profit and loss with probable multi-year effect; (v) operational disruptions beyond controlled environment.
  - Level 3: (i) severe descent in revenue levels; (ii) future feasibility of business case impacted.
- For all of the impacts predicted in the scenarios, relevant mitigation actions should be taken, closely monitored and updated on a weekly basis.
- Mitigation actions should be analyzed according to the level of impact predicted as well as individual business models. However, baseline measures can be considered, such as:
  - Personnel:
    - Freezing hiring plans;
    - Cancel all trainings that are not critical;
    - Reallocate staff to departments critically involved in execution of mitigation measures;
    - Temporary unemployment (if possible under local labor laws);
    - Prohibition of overtime
  - Financial Stability:
    - Defeer or suspend investment CAPEX savings and non-regret suspension;
    - Placing new contracting on-hold;
    - Reconsider and adapt discretionary spending (e.g. marketing, advertising);
    - Negotiate extending payment terms with suppliers to reserve cash;
    - Evaluate cost position and create a mid-long term blueprint of cost saving opportunities (optimize general and administrative costs, run procurement savings programs, implement zero-based budget, etc.)

3. Measures to support customers, stakeholders and community

Ports are actively investigating ways to support their customers and stakeholders to ensure business continuity and overcome the impact of the pandemic in the supply chain.

3.1 Interaction between ship- and shore-based personnel

Several ports report a certain nervousness on the interaction between seafarers and shore-based personnel during port calls.

- This is often attributed to the different regimes and procedures to mitigate risk of infection related to the virus that apply for crew members on board ships (set by flag States and shipping companies) and for shore-based workers (set by national and local authorities).
- Requirements and guidance can be seen to differ from State to State and company to company and these differences regarding what should and should not be applied with respect to managing risk is creating perceptions that some parties are not following appropriate procedures, even though the procedures being followed may be those required by the responsible party.
- In response, IAPH has been cooperating with an initiative led by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) on COVID-19 related guidelines for ensuring a safe shipboard interface between ship- and shore-based personnel. Link to document

3.2 Crew changes

Restrictions on crew changes remain an important concern for the shipping community, for humanitarian, safety and employment-related reasons.

- There is an understanding that in the short-term, restrictions will have to remain largely in place as a response to the immediate public health emergency presented by COVID-19.
- However, a global strategy coordinated with key stakeholders is needed to ease restrictions and facilitate the changeover of ships’ crews from mid-May onwards. This is primarily an issue for governments, but port authorities can play a pro-active role in engaging with government and other relevant stakeholders such as nearby airports.
- A number of ports are introducing some limited exceptions on crew bans, inter alia for humanitarian reasons.
- IAPH has participated in the formulation of a 12-step framework of protocols on crew changes compiled by ICS in coordination with the maritime industry and supported and published by the IMO. The IMO are formally distributing the circular to member states as a recommendation. Link to document

3.3 Social support for mariners

With the remaining restrictions in crew changes, seafarers are often obliged to spend longer periods on board and due to that, may require social support from ashore.

- In response, some ports are allowing welfare visits on board of vessels by social workers and priests, in coordination with the national health authorities and with all protective measures being taken. Ultimately, the decision regarding allowing or not the boarding of such welfare agents, lies with the flag State, the shipping line, the Captain, and the terminal.

3.4 Port charges

All stakeholders in the supply chain are currently mapping the potential financial impact of Covid-19 and looking into different options to mitigate this impact.

- As such, several ports report that revenue-generating stakeholders are requesting a flexibilization of payments (e.g. concerning port dues, concession fees). The response is highly individual as local rules may apply (e.g. local state aid rules), the impact of Covid-19 and speed thereof differ per region and governmental aid and/or support programs are available in certain countries that are more suited towards this end. The response also depends on commercial relations and the governance model of the port.

3.5 Humanitarian actions

In line with their corporate social responsibility programs, several ports are actively addressing the impact of COVID-19 on their local communities and society at large.

- In the framework of their corporate social responsibility activities, ports continue to support ongoing projects and further develop initiatives tackling current COVID-19 related challenges (e.g. supporting local producers in finding alternative ways to sell their products).
- Ports and companies are establishing committees on social responsibility and humanitarian affairs aiming to organize and develop activities to assist their communities. Partnerships with local governments are widely established in order to understand the community needs and ensure synergetic actions to maximize positive impact.
- Many ports are engaging on sourcing, distributing and donating medical supplies and products for fighting COVID-19. Port practices include:
  - Direct purchasing of medical equipment and cleaning products for use within the port community and for donating to health agencies and local authorities.
4.2 Suggestions for port employee mobility around the workplace

- Providing additional parking or facilities such as motorbike areas/ bike-racks.
- Limiting passengers in shuttle vehicles (for example, work minibuses).
- Using markings and introducing one-way flow at entry and exit points. Providing alternatives to touch-based security devices such as keypads for access to rooms and elevators.

4.3 Suggestions for port employee mobility around the workplace

- Reducing movement through and discouraging non-essential trips around the port. For example, restricting access to some areas, encouraging use of remote telecommunications instead plus portable alert systems (such as smart arm/wristbands) to facilitate social distancing.
- Reducing job and equipment rotation (for example, single task for the day).
- Implementing one-way systems if possible on walkways and staircases around the workplace.
- Using signage such as floor markings to mark out 2m to allow controlled flows of people moving throughout the site.

4.4 Suggestions for shift patterns and working groups

- As far as possible, where people are split into teams or shift groups, fixing these teams or shift groups so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.
- Identifying areas where people have to directly pass things to each other (such as job information, spare parts, samples, raw materials) and find ways to remove direct contact (for example by using drop-off points or transfer zones). Risk assessments are recommended involving the employees normally involved in the task in question to increase likelihood of buy-in to the agreed solution.
- Minimizing employee congregation at bottlenecks such as time clocks, reception areas, entrances and exits by staggering arrivals and maintaining strict social distancing during shift handovers by use of floor markings and signage.

4.5 Suggestions for safe indoor and outdoor static workstations

- Avoid employees working face-to-face by, for example, working side-by-side or facing away from each other, ensuring at least 1.5m of physical space between employees.
- If social distancing is not possible, use plexi-screens to separate people from each other.
- Using a consistent pairing system if people have to work in close proximity. This should be considered for two-person working, lifting or maintenance activities that cannot be redesigned, provided they meet local legislation requirements.
- Additional cleaning staff might be needed for conducting more regular deep cleaning of surfaces. Flexible working areas will require extra hygiene attention. Having a second third party cleaning company available in case of infections impacting the main contractor might be advisable.
- Offices with carpets or false ceilings may require hiring third-party companies specialized in cleaning and decontamination.
- Ensure airflow within office area by keeping windows open or by adjusting air conditioners with air-filtration systems. Offices with permanent air conditioning should consult with their supplier or with a specialized HVAC company to ensure clean air flow.
- New technology to assist control social distancing are also being implemented, such as a digital bracelet that ensures social distancing and permits contact tracing.

4.6 Suggestions for meetings

- Before considering any face-to-face meeting, evaluate feasible alternatives first.
- For areas where regular meetings take place, use floor signage to help people maintain social distancing. Where possible, conduct meetings in open or outside spaces.
- Limiting or restricting the use of high-touch items and equipment (for example, printers, whiteboards). Avoiding sharing telecommunication devices, stationary and/or other objects.

4.7 Suggestions for communal areas

- Balancing human need for interaction with unnecessary risks associated with social gatherings of

4.2 Suggestions for port employees entering and leaving port areas and offices

- Staggering arrival and departure times at work to reduce crowding in to and from the workplace.
- Limiting access points and set up areas outside the building or port areas to check employee temperatures on a daily basis.
more than two persons will require careful attention towards:
- Ensuring sufficient space across common areas (e.g. receptions, staircases).
- Staggering break times to reduce pressure on break rooms or canteens.
- Using outdoor areas for common areas where possible.
- Using protective screening for staff in receptions, dining or similar areas.
- Reconfiguring seating and tables to maintain spacing and reduce face-to-face interactions by use of plexi-screens.
- Regulating use of locker rooms, changing areas and other facility areas to reduce concurrent usage.

4.8 Suggestions related to digital port systems

- Review the changes that occurred during the application of restrictions and lockdown and their impact on digital systems, operations and processes. Take action to adapt digital systems accordingly and increase their resilience for any similar situations in the future.
- Digitalize all processes that are still paper-based, where feasible.
- Ensure authentication and security processes of port digital systems, including cyber security measures. All actions should take into consideration an exceptional increase in external access conditions.

4.9 Facilitating a positive workplace mindset

- Provide useful tips for employees by strategically placing signage and posters in communal areas on health and safety measures.
- Encourage a positive mindset by proposing alternative greeting and farewell gestures as well as briefings on good practices and new ideas and suggestions from the employees themselves (see COMMUNICATIONS PLAN section).

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Contact us and provide your feedback

To share information about your actions to mitigate the potential impact of COVID-19 on your port or for any questions you may have, please contact us at: covid19@sustainableworldports.org.