

A POSITIVE STEP

GRAEME DAY IS GROUP FIRE SERVICE COMPLIANCE AND ASSURANCE MANAGER FOR BAA AIRPORTS. HE EXPLAINS TO JOSE SANCHEZ DE MUNIAIN WHY THE LEADING UK AIRPORT OPERATOR IS CURRENTLY SWITCHING OVER TO FLUORINE-FREE FOAM.



Graeme Day, Compliance and Assurance Manager, BAA Airports. BAA operates five airports in the UK: Heathrow; Stansted; Aberdeen; Glasgow; and Southampton.

When did you start considering fluorine-free foam?

In 2010 we realised that we were discharging a lot of foam during our annual calibration tests and we felt that we should start looking at a procedure that would comply with the requirements of CAP 168, Chapter 8, and reduce our impact on the environment. We had also received notice from Thames Water that from a specific date, regulations would prohibit us from discharging our existing firefighting foam to the draining system at Heathrow Airport. Consequently we took the opportunity to look for a product that would meet both our operational and environmental needs. The option of creating a holding area from where the run-off foam and water could be taken away for incineration proved to be time consuming and costly to achieve, so we decided to research fluorine and organohalogen-free firefighting foam products.

In addition, our existing foam contract was coming to an end so it was a perfect time to look at a less environmentally damaging alternative.

Talk us through the process

The first starting point was to ensure that all the products being assessed conformed to the requirements of ICAO level B. They also had to be fluorine and organohalogen free. We involved our procurement and environmental teams and received input from the Civil Aviation Authority during this assessment. We asked a number of companies to confirm in writing that they met these requirements and then asked them to submit tender documents in compliance with our procurement process. We sifted through the entries considering operational effectiveness; environmental considerations; financial checks; company history etc.

We then asked three organisations to present their products to our project team based at Heathrow, and following a scoring process took two products to CNPP in France for independently accredited tests, which were witnessed by the Civil Aviation Authority.

What did the fire tests reveal?

We carried out operational effectiveness tests based on ICAO regulations for level B foam and both products performed identically. The operational data from these tests helped to inform our purchasing process supporting BAA's procurement scoring and e-auction tools.

Are you happy with the foam?

Purchasing a fluorine and organohalogen-free firefighting foam is a positive step for BAA RFFS [Rescue and Fire Fighting Service] because it means that we will have an operationally effective product that meets all our environmental requirements. It also ties in with the Civil Aviation Authority's aim to reduce the overall environmental impact of aviation.

Do you have a view on CAFS?

CAFS for ARFF is very exciting and I'm looking forward to getting ICAO's view of the results of recent live fire tests carried out with CAA. If accepted by ICAO the aviation industry will be able to gain financially and operationally from the use of CAFS. [Update: the proposals were approved by ICAO during the recent meeting in Montreal.]

Would you recommend other airports follow the fluorine-free route?

Yes definitely, and in partnership with the Civil Aviation Authority we have already shared our experience with the ARFF community. We have also spoken to the Chief Fire Officers Association about the potential impacts of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services bringing foams containing fluorinated compounds to an airport that is using fluorine and organohalogen free firefighting foam. Many Fire and Rescue Services are currently reviewing their foam strategies and we are encouraging them to start thinking about fluorine and organohalogen free-products.