



# BEST PRACTICE BLUEPRINT FOR COLD CHAIN TRANSPORTERS

GCCA Transportation continues its mission to ensure members meet and exceed the best global standards in transporting perishable goods.

For five years, GCCA's Certified Cold Carrier program has helped transportation companies comply with food safety laws. The bedrock of the Certified Cold Carrier, and the primary tool to achieving and maintaining compliance, is the Cold Chain Transportation Best Practices Guide (BPG).



The International Refrigerated Transportation Association (IRTA), now GCCA Transportation, worked with cold chain industry professionals and other stakeholders to develop the original BPG, which Cold Carrier Certification program participants agree to use. “What was accomplished was a comprehensive guide that all of industry could agree were the best practices,” says Don Durm, Vice President of Strategic Customer Solutions at PLM Fleet and Chairman of GCCA Transportation.

The BPG spells out industry best practices to help shippers, loaders, carriers by motor or rail vehicle and receivers involved in transporting human and animal food to use documented sanitary practices to ensure the safety of that food.

One of the key drivers in the development of the original BPG was that cold chain stakeholders needed to address new requirements laid down in the United States Federal Sanitary Modernization Act (FSMA). According to Durm, “The FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] specifically stated 33 times within the rule that it will rely on ‘industry best practices’ for enforcement,” he says. “All the stakeholders in the cold chain – warehouse, logistics, transportation, equipment manufacturers and the scientific community – came together and agreed on what the best practices should be.”

Durm explains the GCCA, as the place where cold chain stakeholders go to meet and collaborate, was in the best position to drive the discussion of cold chain best practices.

First published in 2016 – it was time for the BPG to be updated.

Members of GCCA Transportation volunteered to review the BPG and identify any modifications, unclear items or missing subject areas. Since the BPG is the foundation reference for the Certified Cold Carrier program, the Transportation Board of Directors also considered how any modifications affect the Cold Carrier Certification criteria.

The GCCA Transportation members that participated in the BPG review group are PLM Fleet, J.B. Hunt, United States Cold Storage Transport, FLGO Freight and Midwest Refrigerated Services, Inc.

Their efforts on modifying the BPG are now complete.

A few of those members share their thoughts here on the modifications to the BPG, the review group experience and the impact of being a Certified Cold Carrier.

### **Global Scope**

“A best practice is a best practice and if expressed correctly can be applied universally,” says Don Durm, PLM Fleet, addressing the modifications to the BPG. “Initially, the key driver was to establish a benchmark for industry standard FSMA rules, and we provided guidance to meet regulatory compliance, but now we needed to make the BPG more global in scope.”

Durm notes the BPG documents may have been confusing audiences outside of the U.S. regulatory environment.

“Simplification,” is why the BPG was modified, says Wib Zook, Transport Compliance Consultant at United States Cold Storage. “It merged GCCA, IRTA and IARW to better assist and be inclusive of shippers, loaders, carriers and receivers in helping all to better understand the value of consistent best practices of handling and food safety. And hopefully it will encourage other carriers to become active partners with these initiatives.”

### **Addressing Challenges**

“The transportation industry is often viewed from a grand scale – big equipment, large quantities, long hauls,” says Lauren Wilson, Senior Manager of Food Safety, Health Science and Animal Welfare at J.B. Hunt. “While those are certainly important, it’s also essential that we pay close attention to the small details so they aren’t overlooked in the mix, especially from a safety perspective. And safety and efficiency go hand-in-hand.”

Wilson says whether it’s something as small as a temperature reading or the numbers on a bill of lading, the details can make a significant impact on product quality and safety.

“The Cold Chain Transportation Best Practices go a long way in this regard, because the shippers are made more aware of the significance of these details,” Wilson says. “If a trailer arrives and it doesn’t meet all sanitary standards, the shipper will be able to reject it before contamination could ever occur.”

Zook points out the temperature-controlled

transportation market is extremely competitive. “Being best in class requires proven processes and credibility. The Certified Cold Carrier program provides exactly that with the appropriate training for staff and drivers on how to stay current with the best practices in food safety management.”

Durm says one of the biggest challenges was the lack of standardization of best practices across trading partners, or even within companies, that could be relied on.

“It was my experience working all along the cold chain that everyone had an operational best practice and they were all different,” Durm says. “This created potential hazards or gaps during handoffs, both internally and externally between warehouse, to picker, to loader, to transport, to the receiver.”

“Another common challenge we see is that cold chain stakeholders may not be familiar with refrigerated transport equipment and will put requirements on the load that yield no benefit to product integrity and add expense to transport that can’t be recaptured,” says Durm. “The Cold Chain Transportation Best Practices become a starting point to have a conversation that is critical in the execution of ensuring safe, efficient and compliant transportation.”

### **Advantages to Certification**

“The Certified Cold Carrier program provides a set of standards that give companies like J.B. Hunt a way to measure success, evaluate operational performance and ensure the safety of its deliveries for customers,” says Wilson. “Our customers, on the other hand, have a way to recognize that success and feel safe, knowing that their provider is meeting all sanitary standards in their deliveries.”

Zook says there a number of positives for United States Cold Storage Transport in partnering with the Certified Cold Carrier program, and one is that certification provides visibility. “As our trucks travel the many highways, the Certified Cold Carrier logos are a visible means of conveying our commitment to food safety practices.”

Certification creates a sense of pride and is far more than just a means of keeping United States Cold Storage current with industry standards, says Zook. “Our associate drivers

take pride in responding to questions such as what is the Certified Cold Carrier logo, and being an advocate for these initiatives. They're proud of the logos on their trucks," he says. "It reinforces our commitment to 'Best in Cold' and fuels the passion that motivates our drivers."

Zook adds Certified Cold Carrier initiatives and processes assist company personnel to be better prepared for both internal and external audits.

Regulators provide significant flexibility to operators to ensure that they are implementing the best procedures for the circumstances and purposes under which they operate, notes Durm. "However, I know from experience that businesses appreciate a strong, clear reference point to benchmark what constitutes industry best practices and that is what the Certified Cold Carrier program delivers," he says. "The added benefit to the day-to-day business execution in implementing the best practices will yield operational efficiency, saving time and money in a highly competitive environment."

### Driving Culture and Creating Trust

"Going through the Certified Cold Carrier program helps align companies and personnel with the cold chain transportation best practices that will help drive a food safety culture within the company," says Durm. "Safety is the single most crucial responsibility of businesses charged with transporting a nation's food, and the Certified Cold Carrier plays a pivotal role in ensuring safe, efficient and compliant transportation within the cold chain industry."

Durm adds, "And consumers benefit from a highly professional, experienced, and well-regulated food supply chain."

Wilson says one of the company's brand foundations is people you trust, and that trust was developed over decades. "Our safety culture is very much a part of why our brand remains strong and trustworthy," she says. "We keep our safety culture sharp and current through regular training that emphasizes not just the importance of our protocols, but the why behind them."

She says each person plays a vital role, and the company's culture emphasizes they understand the value of their contribution to the overall process. "Best practices become

## Top Advice From the Cold Chain Transportation Best Practices Guide

GET IT IN WRITING	KEEP IT COOL
<p>Agree <b>IN WRITING</b> the expectations of the customer/shipper before taking on a job. This includes specifying expectations for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Packaging</li> <li>• Stowage</li> <li>• Temperature management</li> <li>• Sanitation, and</li> <li>• Handling</li> </ul> <p>Keep <b>RECORDS</b> and be <b>OPEN</b> to inspection</p>	<p>Leave <b>NOTHING TO CHANCE</b> when managing temperature on collection, delivery and whilst on the move – ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment is to the necessary standard and working correctly</li> <li>• Vehicles are pre-cooled before loading</li> <li>• Air circulation is possible when loaded</li> </ul>
USE TECHNOLOGY, BUT HAVE BACK-UPS	FOCUS ON RISKS
<p>Technology provides significant time and cost savings and ensures transparency at a level not possible 20 years ago – wherever possible, invest in real-time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Load tracking</li> <li>• Temperature monitoring</li> <li>• Record keeping</li> </ul> <p><b>BUT</b> do not use technology as a substitute for visual checks, driver use training because systems fail sometimes</p>	<p>Food safety is based on awareness and control of risks. Stay ahead of the most prominent risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross contamination</li> <li>• Allergen exposure</li> <li>• Food crimes (like fraud or malicious contamination)</li> </ul> <p>Join, participate and learn with fellow practitioners in the GCCA network</p>

second nature in a culture where each person feels valued, and violations are met with a 'not on my watch' mindset."

"The culture at United States Cold Storage is driven by the motto 'Best in Cold' and represents who we are," says Zook. "Understanding what our customers need and how the best carriers operate help drive our initiatives, and our Customer and Carrier Advisory Boards help provide valuable feedback and critique to strengthen our trusted network. This supports our mission to stay well aligned with the Certified Cold Carrier best practices and share the success with our customers."

### The Reviewer Experience

Zook says the experience of being an instrumental part of the group that revised the BPG was eye opening, educational and an opportunity to network. Also, he says he grasped a better understanding of the values

and benefits of temperature-controlled food handling and safety in a competitive industry. "I've become an advocate for and promoter of these Certified Cold Carrier best practices initiatives."

"It has been my honor to have been a part of this document since its inception and contribute to the Best Practices Guide, which will enhance the brand and image of carriers globally," says Durm. "The majority of refrigerated motor carrier capacity is fragmented across thousands of logistic companies, and the best practices provide a level playing field for everyone. The Certified Cold Carrier designation allows carriers to differentiate themselves among their peers."

"Because J.B. Hunt was one of the first certified cold carriers in the program, I was afforded an early opportunity to take our own program to the next level," says Wilson. "I learned so much from this collaboration



and came away from the experience feeling energized.”

Wilson says it’s great to see the Cold Carrier Best Practices Guide expand from a limited set of best practices to ones that are more robust and widely applicable. “Being able to play a part in that expansion is a true source of pride for me personally.”

**ALEXANDRA WALSH** is a Senior Publishing Consultant with Association Vision and Editor-in-Chief of COLD FACTS.

**EMAIL:** [awalsh@associationvision.com](mailto:awalsh@associationvision.com)

## 10 Benefits of Being a Certified Cold Carrier

The Certified Cold Carrier:

1. Recognizes asset-based carrier organizations for their commitment to the sanitary and safe transportation of perishable products.
2. Provides independent, third-party assurance that an asset-based carrier company is aligned with industry-prescribed best practices.
3. Gives customers confidence to entrust their refrigerated and frozen shipments to participating carriers.
4. Provides industry with a benchmark of refrigerated best practices that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recognized.
5. Is accepted by shippers that understand the high standards that certification from GCCA brings.
6. Provides documented use of the refrigerated transportation best practices that reduce food waste, improve operational fleet efficiency and save on fuel consumption.
7. Helps companies prepare for audits.
8. Is a driver recruitment /retention tool.
9. Requires a review of best practices and creates an opportunity to re-engage drivers and staff on critical temperature control processes.
10. Delivers on the industry’s promise to transport safe nutritious food to the consumer.

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9009 COLDWATER ROAD  
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