

To the
UFE Member Associations

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Information No. 1/2010

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Dear colleagues,

1. 45th UFE Congress in Portugal in September 2010

At the 44th Congress of UFE in Budapest, our Portuguese colleagues with their Chairman Helder Ferreira agreed to organise the 45th Congress of UFE in Portugal in September 2010.

Our Portuguese colleagues as well as the Presiding Board / General Secretariat of UFE have been dealing with the planning for a fairly long time now. The fine adjustment is currently underway.

The 38th calendar week 2010 is planned for the 45th Congress of UFE.

We will enquire your participation as soon as the exact dates have been determined.

2. Cooperation with CESI (Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants)

In view of member unions of UFE from the customs and/or tax area, which are not organised in a general European umbrella association via a national umbrella association, the Presiding Board of UFE decided at its last meeting at the beginning of December 2009, to explore possibilities for cooperation with CESI.

The Presiding Board of UFE, in cooperation with CESI, wants to open up the possibility for the member unions to cover their information needs in regards to general work- and socio-political European topics with visits of the respective board meetings of CESI. It is to be clearly emphasised, that only cooperation with CESI is planned, not an accession of UFE to CESI.

For clarification purposes, it was to be mentioned, that since its foundation in 1963, UFE has been understanding itself as a subject-specific union of the tax and

customs unions, which is dealing with the special problems of the tax and customs administrations in Europe. Therefore, the exchange of information about developments and problems of the tax and customs administrations in Europe always has been and always will be the centre point of the work of UFE, emphasising the particular claim of the tax and customs officers due to their highly qualified training and function. Thus, the protection of interests of UFE exclusively orientates by the needs of the employees in the European tax and customs administrations and is not influenced by the consideration of interests of other groups of employees of the civil service. The officials of UFE exclusively are tax or customs officers. Like someone with a toothache is best treated by a dentist and not by a general practitioner, the European tax and customs unions are appropriately organised in the UFE, independent of or in addition to, respectively, a membership in a general European umbrella union via a national umbrella union.

Only as a marginal note: the German Tax Union is organised in CESI via its national umbrella union, the German Civil Service Federation.

3. Minutes of the meeting of the Presiding Board of UFE in Brussels on 22nd September 2009

Please find enclosed the minutes of the 131st meeting of the Presiding Board of UFE in Brussels on 22nd September 2009.

4. Study about gassing agent residues and toxic industrial chemicals in import containers

At the session of the Customs Commission of UFE in Brussels on 21st September 2009, we had reported about a study of Hamburg University about gassing agent residues and toxic industrial chemicals in import containers. Please find enclosed an abstract of this study in German, English and French.

5. Instruction leaflet about the inspection of containers from overseas

Referring to the discussion at the session of the Customs Commission in Brussels on 21st September 2009, please find enclosed an instruction leaflet of the German customs with precautions for the inspection of containers from overseas in German, English and French.

6. Enquiry about the situation of the customs administrations of the EU member states

In respect of the enquiry about the situation in the customs administrations of the EU member states, so far only replies from Great Britain (PCS), Hungary (VPFSZ), Norway (NT) and Spain (GESTHA) have been received.

On the one hand, we need your replies for the preparation of a representative documentation about the situation of the customs administrations in Europe, and on the other hand also for the preparation of a resolution of the Customs Commission or the UFE Committee, respectively. We therefore request your cooperation and the transmission of the still pending replies. For facilitation purposes, we enclosed the survey again in German, English and French.

Yours sincerely,



(R. Zender)
UFE General Secretary

General information

Inspect containers from overseas with care!

Containers are fumigated for reasons of stored products and plant protection. There are often no warning notices as to the fumigation in the shipping documents or at/in the container. During the control of overseas containers which come, e.g., from Asia or Africa, health hazards caused by fumigants or treatment agents and by micro organisms (fungal spores) must be expected in connection with the inspection of containers.

In order to keep the hazards for officers as low as possible safety advices and protective measures are published with the request for attention and notice.

The recipient has to anticipate that the merchandise is fumigated for reasons of stored products and plant protection, and that there are still gas residues in the containers in a concentration hazardous to health.

The fumigants are often odourless, and can, thus, not be sensed. However, there are indications which reveal a possible fumigation. A **visual inspection** can provide first indications (existence of identifications marks – labels – at the outsides of the containers and/or if the ventilation slots are sealed).

Containers with sealed ventilation slots are suspicious in any event!

Even check measurements at open containers are not reliable in any case. The defumigation of separately packed merchandise may last several days.

Let the driver open the containers.

Check for exterior features in the loading area after having opened the containers! If there are cans, metal casings or other receptacles at the port of the container one has to assume fumigation. Even if there are not any indications of fumigation available fumigation cannot be excluded!

Step back from the hazardous area!

The fumigants methyl bromide and sulphur fluoride/sulphuryl difluoride, which are rarely used in Germany, are not identifiable by their odour. Products such as textiles and wood products, e.g. rattan furniture, but also goods, which are packed on wooden pallets or in wooden boxes or which are fastened with dunnage bars, belong, among other things, to the fumigated goods.

It is only allowed to inspect defumigated containers.

Another possible health hazard can result from treatment agents or micro organisms (fungal spores). Packaging wood for stones, earthen ware, etc., is often fungus infected. Clouds of fungal spores may ascend when opening the containers or touching the wood. These are so-called moulds which throughout produce mycotoxins pathogenic for man.

The Hamburg University –Department for Official Plant Inspection (Dr Müller-Sannmann) has now informed that the **existence of moulds** at wood, which is placed in the container as dunnage wood, transport boxes, pallets or in any other form, is

not a general indicator of the absence of fumigation.

It is rather possible that fumigation may advance the growth of moulds. This depends individually on the way of fumigation and the fumigant used. Special care is necessary anyway when opening a container.

Personal protective equipment should include here:

- disposable protective gloves (Consumer Goods Act No. 1459)
- disposable respirator mask (Consumer Goods Act No. 1555)
- disposable protective suit (Consumer Goods Act No. 1410)

When wearing a respirator mask more than 30 minutes per shift the fitness of the officer has to be assured by an occupational medical checkup according to the regulations of the professional associations for medical checkups – G 26.

Qualified institutions (fire brigade or agencies for technical relief) have to be involved in the inspection if there are unlabelled containers or in case of imminent danger.

A final determination of protective measures is not possible at the moment since there are not respective measuring methods available for all fumigants. Therefore, it is important to sensitise the officers for these health hazards. The controls of containers have to be exercised with utmost care and caution.

The chief of the office has to instruct the officers advising them of the health hazards during the inspection of fumigated containers and of micro organisms. The specialists for labour safety may provide training material.

Fumigant Residues and Toxic Industrial Chemicals in Import Containers

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Summary

Fumigant residues and toxic industrial chemicals in import containers can be hazardous to the health of the personnel concerned. In order to be able to evaluate the hazard air samples in a large representative number as possible from more than 2,000 import containers should have been analysed in the scope of this study. It has been the objectives of the nine-week measuring campaign to gain data for the comparison of devices as well as to test newer suitable measurement devices during routine operation to compare their results – as far as possible with established laboratory techniques (Thermodesorption-Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry, TD-GC-MS).

A Hazardous Substance-Detector-Array (hand-held device, GDA II, Airsense), a Selected Flow Tube Mass Spectrometry (floor-mounted device, SIFT-MS, Voice 100, Syft Technologies), a mobile TD-GC-MS (EM 640S Bruker Daltoniks) and a laboratory TD-GC-MS (Agilent G530N-MS5973N) as well as short term detector tubes (Fumigation-Test-Set, Dräger) have been applied.

Depending on the country of origin, toxic gaseous substances, mainly at low concentration, have been contained in up to about 50 % of the containers.

In 17 % (367 containers) of the 2111 import containers tested, cut-off values have been exceeded: phosphorus hydride (27), bromomethane (8), 1,2-dichloroethane (12), trichloronitromethane (chloropicrin) (27), formaldehyde (218), benzene (130). The cut-off values of the following toxic substances have been exceeded by more than the tenfold: bromomethane (1), trichloronitromethane (13), phosphorus hydride (14), 1,2-dichloroethane (5).

The GDA II has proved to be a broadband measuring warning device for detection, but it is not suitable for the identification of single fumigants by now. It has delivered a warning signal for most of the fumigants (apart from, e.g., formaldehyde) within 10 seconds. The SIFT-MS has been able to identify all gases in principle, but often delivered wrong positive results (signal even though any substance existed) for ethylene oxide, formaldehyde, phosphorus hydride, sulphur difluoride, and 1,2-dichloroethane. Wrong negative indication (substance existed, but no signal) have occurred in the measurements with the SIFT-MS and the GDA II only to a limited extent and only in the range of low concentrations. The wrong negative and wrong positive results have been found out with the help of the TD-GC-MS analyses.

The results which have been obtained from the short term detector tubes (Dräger) have comparatively often been wrongly positive or wrongly negative.

The results show that the field devices are in principle suitable to indicate a hazard quickly and, thus, to initiate safety measures. But there is a need for optimisation as to the wrong positive results, which have, among other things, to be reduced under economic aspects (unnecessary ventilations and clearance measurements).

The study has shown that, under the aspect of health protection, the surveillance and preventive measures have, apart from fumigants, also to be extended to further toxic and/or cancerogenic substances. This refers especially to imports of shoes and textiles from Southeast Asia. Under preventive aspects, such risk containers, especially if ventilation slots are sealed, may only be entered after exclusion of toxic contaminant loads using suitable measurement devices, if necessary, after sufficient ventilation and clearance measurement.

To the
Members of the Customs Commission
in the Union of Finance Personal in Europe

**Questionnaire as to the Situation of the Customs Administrations in
the EU Member States**

**Session of the Customs Commission in Brussels on 21 September
2009**

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to refer to the session of our Customs Commission in Brussels on 21 September 2009, and thank you for the confidence to head the Commission as chairman until the Committee Congress in Lisbon in September 2010. I do hope that we will be able to make a step ahead towards our common targets within the next few months.

We have discussed the situation in Brussels and noted that, despite all differences in the organisational structures, our customs administrations have quite a lot of common problems. During the discussion, it has turned out that staff cuts, the number of physical goods examinations and poor remuneration are the major facts. It has also been pointed out that customs administrations often have a low importance for the governments in the member states.

We have agreed upon the fact that ufe and the Customs Commission should not only promote an exchange of opinions. We see our task in a grouping of trade union interests, too, which have to be discussed and further developed with the Committee and the European Parliament.

We have stated in a final evaluation that the problems of the member states and the demands of ufe have already been described to the point in the

resolution of the 44th Committee Congress of ufe in Budapest in September 2008. Therefore, an up-to-date query shall be organised among the members of the Customs Commission on this basis. The results of the query will then be discussed in the Presiding Board in December 2009. It will afterwards decide upon the necessary trade union activities towards the European Parliament and the Committee.

I have illustrated in Brussels that we have received the replies to queries very sporadically and often late in the past. Now we all are challenged to give a new impetus to ufe and the Customs Commission.

Therefore, I kindly ask you to send your replies to the questions (enclosure) under the reference "ufe Customs Commission" to the e-mail address post@bdz.dbb.de or the postal address: BDZ Deutsche Zoll- und Finanzgewerkschaft, Friedrichstraße 169/170, D 101117 Berlin, not later than 30 November 2009.

I remain with my best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Klaus H. Leprich
Vice-President and
Chairman of the Customs Commission