

ETRC Recommendations on Use of STEBs and carrier bags in Duty Free and Travel Retail

Background

Restrictions that currently apply to liquids, aerosols and gels (LAGs) were considered and adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), following the unveiling in 2006 of a terrorist plot against aircraft using liquid explosives. Security tamper-evident bags (STEBs) were then developed to preserve a high level of security whilst allowing an exemption to volumetric controls for liquids purchased at airport retail outlets or on board aircraft and carried by transfer passengers.

STEBs are not carrier bags. They are security features designed to facilitate visual inspections at security screening points during the passenger journey. Their production, including technical specifications, and use are therefore strictly controlled.

Since January 2014, European airports (EU+EEA) are obliged to screen with special liquid explosive detection equipment LAGs sealed in STEBs together with proof of purchase. While in the future, the evolution of screening technology may allow for the lifting of the restrictions on LAGs in Europe, and make the use of STEBs redundant, STEBs are for the moment necessary features which are fully part of the international aviation security system.

This is clearly stated by ICAO: *“As the use of liquid explosives remains a significant aviation security concern, the current ICAO guidelines on security controls for LAGs are effective in mitigating the threat posed by liquid explosives and should remain in effect and universally implemented by all Member States until effective, efficient and widely adoptable detection technology becomes available that will facilitate the gradual replacement of the current restrictions.”*¹

ETRC believe nonetheless it is our responsibility to promote best practices within the Duty Free and Travel Retail channel that take into consideration the sustainability aspect and environmental impact of our members’ operations. This includes supporting EU, national and industry initiatives seeking to promote environmentally-friendly processes such as the reduction of single-use plastic bags.

With this in mind, ETRC are issuing the following recommendations to support retailers, airports and airlines to minimize the environmental impact of their operations while taking into account specificities in terms of security, safety and operational requirements, by encouraging a correct and responsible use of STEBs and carrier bags in Duty Free and Travel Retail.

¹ ICAO website page ‘Liquids, Aerosol and Gels & Security Tamper-Evident Bags’
https://www.icao.int/Security/SFP/LAGS_STEBS/Pages/default.aspx



Definitions

For the purpose of this document:

- **‘Security tamper-evident bag’ (STEB)** is a bag that conforms to the recommended security control guidelines of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in the implementation of recommended security control guidelines for screening liquids, aerosols and gels (LAGs) carried by transferring passengers. STEBs are to be manufactured in accordance with the technical specifications listed by ICAO.
- **‘Liquids, aerosols and gels’ (LAGs)** shall include pastes, lotions, liquid/solid mixtures and the contents of pressurised containers, such as toothpaste, hair gel, drinks, soups, syrups, perfume, shaving foam and other items with similar consistencies.
- **‘Carrier bag’** is a bag provided by retailers at point of sale, either for free or against a fee, for shoppers to carry home their purchases. While there is a great variety of material used for their production, carrier bags used in travel retail are in general reusable, due to safety considerations which require bags to be of a certain thickness for passengers to carry their products safely throughout their journey.

ETRC Recommendations for the Use of STEBs

When to use a STEB?

A STEB should only be used to pack LAGs purchased at airport retail outlets or on board of an aircraft by passengers transferring at an airport later during their journey. A STEB is necessary to allow passengers to take these items on to their next flight.

For non-LAGs items, a carrier bag is enough.

Can STEBs be made of any material?

No. STEBs are to be manufactured in accordance with the technical specifications listed in ICAO recommendations, which require that STEBs must be transparent (high impact low density polyethylene (LDPE) or equivalent) and of a minimum of 50 microns thickness.

ETRC strongly encourage retailers to procure STEBs that are recyclable and eco-friendly when possible.

Are STEBs reusable?

No. By definition and for security purposes, a STEB can only be sealed once and therefore used once.

Once used, STEBs should be disposed according to local waste disposal requirements.

How to procure STEBs?

STEBs must be procured from the ICAO approved list of manufacturers and distributors².

² Last update available dated 25 September 2019:

https://www.icao.int/Security/SFP/LAGS_STEBS/Documents/STEBs%20Manufacturers%20and%20Distributors%2025%20September%202019.pdf



Reminder for operational purposes

- Till staff should place LAGs purchases for transfer passengers in a STEB together with the proof of purchase (receipt).
- Passengers should be informed that STEBs must remain sealed until they reach their final destination, and that they must present them at the security controls of the transfer point.
- Failure to follow this procedure would result in passengers having to surrender their LAGs at the transfer screening point.

ETRC Recommendations for the Use of Carrier Bags

When to use a carrier bag?

A carrier bag may be used:

- For passengers purchasing any type of item including LAGs on direct EU flights.
- For passengers not purchasing LAGs and transferring at another airport.

Can carrier bags be made of any material?

Yes and no. A great variety of materials can be used to manufacture carrier bags including plastic, paper, fibers, or fabric.

However, retailers must be aware that local regulations may demand carrier bags to abide to certain requirements with regards to technical specifications such as thickness, material, recyclability and biodegradability as well as a minimum charge.

Are carrier bags always required?

Not necessarily. Providing a carrier bag for every transaction should not be automatic, in particular when purchasing small items such as make-up. It is a choice which lies with each passenger.

ETRC advise that till staff provide a carrier bag upon passenger request.

In some instances however, items purchased in Duty Free and Travel Retail may be required to be packed in carrier bags for operational considerations. That is the case for example of a voluntary initiative in the UK to use sealed carrier bags for liquor purchased in UK airport outlets as part of retailers' commitment to the industry Code of Practice on Disruptive Passengers.

ETRC Guidelines for Till Staff Training

There are three outcomes possible when concluding a transaction with passengers:

1. Pack LAGs in a STEB for transfer passengers; or
2. Pack items in a carrier bag; or
3. Hand over items to passengers.

Till staff are on the front line when it comes to assessing whether STEBs or carrier bags are needed to allow passengers to safely bring their purchases home. An appropriate training is therefore paramount to optimize the use of STEBs and carrier bags in Duty Free and Travel Retail resulting in a positive impact on the environment.

You will find in the Annex a set of questions that will help till staff assessing whether LAGs need to be packed in a STEB or a carrier bag, or can be handed over.

ANNEX: Use of STEBs and carrier bags in Duty free and Travel Retail for Till Staff

