

EASA Ground Operations - The Shift from "Self-Regulation" to "EASA Oversight"

Sofema Online considers an optimized training solution - Compliance, Root Cause & Investigation Skills for Ground Operations Package

Introduction

The ground operations sector, long considered the "missing domain" within the European eco system, is currently undergoing a significant regulatory upgrade

The Core Shift: From "Airlines" to "Direct Accountability"

Previously, if a ground handler made a mistake, EASA looked at the **Airline's** Safety Management System (SMS) to ask why they didn't oversee their contractor better.

- **The Change:** Under **2025/20**, Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs) are now **directly accountable** to National Aviation Authorities.
- **The Mechanism:** GHSPs must now submit a "Declaration of Capability" to their authority. This moves ground handling from a "best effort" service to a "declared and regulated" aviation activity, similar to maintenance or flight ops.

Key Regulatory Components:

- **Part-ORGH (Organisation Requirements):** Focuses on the structure of the provider, including management systems and contracting.
- **Part-GH.OPS (Operational Requirements):** Standardized procedures for ramp handling, passenger service, and aircraft servicing.
- **The Declaration Regime:** Providers no longer just sign a contract; they must formally declare their compliance to their National Aviation Authority (NAA).

The "Big Four" Operational Requirements

These regulations mandate that every GHSP operating at an EASA-regulated airport must implement:

- **Mandatory SMS:** A scalable Safety Management System that includes hazard identification and safety reporting—no longer just a "corporate suggestion" but a legal requirement.
- **GSE Maintenance:** Formalized maintenance programs for Ground Support Equipment (tugs, loaders, de-icing rigs). This targets the high rate of ramp accidents caused by equipment failure.

- **Training & Competence:** Standardized training requirements. Staff must not only be trained once but must demonstrate continuous competence to a set EASA standard.
- **Cybersecurity (Part-IS):** Ground handling is now officially integrated into the (EU) 2022/1645 framework. Since handlers access sensitive airline weight-and-balance data and departure control systems, they must now have a formal Information Security Management System (ISMS).

The "Cooperative Oversight" Model (2025/23)

This is the "Implementing Regulation" side of the house. It solves a major industry headache: Audit Fatigue.

- **The Old Way:** A single large ground handler at a hub like Frankfurt might be audited 50 times a year by 50 different airlines.
- **The New Way: Regulation 2025/23** establishes "Cooperative Oversight." National authorities will now share audit data. If the German authority audits a GHSP's safety system, other authorities (and potentially airlines) can rely on that oversight, reducing the burden on the handler while increasing the actual safety floor.

Sofema Note – The shift toward "Cooperative Oversight" under Regulation (EU) 2025/23 is a double-edged sword.

While it promises to liberate Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs) from the "audit-a-day" lifestyle (where a single handler might face 600+ audits annually), it opens a complex Pandora's box regarding GDPR and Corporate Confidentiality.

This is effectively a "grand experiment" in cross-border safety data sharing. Here is a breakdown of the untested risks and the tension between safety and privacy.

Current Timeline: The 2026 Countdown - the industry is currently at a "halfway house" point.

Milestone	Date	Significance
Regulation Published	March 2025	The clock started ticking.
Implementation Gap Analysis	Now (Early 2026)	GHSPs are currently performing "Gap Analyses" between their old voluntary standards and the new EASA Law.
Declaration Window Starts	March 2027	GHSPs must begin formally declaring their compliance to their National Aviation Authorities.
Full Applicability	March 2028	The "Hard Stop." Any GHSP without a valid declaration and a functioning SMS cannot legally operate at EASA airports.

Why this is "Full Swing" right now:

Most GHSPs are currently in the middle of the EASA Implementation Webinars (the 4th one is scheduled for next month, March 2026). They are currently deciding whether to stick with industry standards (like IATA’s AHM/IGOM) as their "Acceptable Means of Compliance" or develop their own proprietary systems.

The Disconnect between EASA & IATA ISAGO

The Regulatory Mismatch: EASA vs. ISAGO - The core of the conflict lies in the definition of "closure" for a safety or quality finding.

Feature	EASA (Regulation 2025/20 & 2025/23)	IATA ISAGO / Standard Industry Practice
Primary Goal	Regulatory Compliance & Total System Safety	Operational Standardization & Audit Efficiency
Investigation Scope	Mandatory: Root Cause AND Contributing Factors	Mandatory: Root Cause (Contributing Factors often optional/implied)
Accountability	Direct Legal Accountability to the NAA	Contractual Accountability to the Airline

Feature	EASA (Regulation 2025/20 & 2025/23)	IATA ISAGO / Standard Industry Practice
Methodology	Expects systemic analysis (Human Factors, Org. Culture)	Often focuses on the immediate "Corrective Action"

Why EASA insists on Contributing Factors

EASA views "Root Cause" as the fundamental reason the failure occurred, but they recognize that in complex ground operations, a single root cause rarely exists in a vacuum.

- Contributing Factors are the "enablers" the high ambient noise, the time pressure of a quick turnaround, or the poor lighting on the ramp.
- Under EASA's new SMS mandates, if you don't address the contributing factors, the risk remains "tolerable" at best, rather than "mitigated."

Reconciling the Two Frameworks

To reconcile these, you must adopt a "Highest Common Denominator" approach. If you are an EASA-regulated GHSP, the IATA standard is no longer your ceiling; it is your floor.

The Reconciliation Strategy:

- Upgrade the Investigation Template: Do not use two different forms. Update your internal SMS reporting tool to include a mandatory field for *Contributing Factors (Human Factors/Environmental)* even when performing an ISAGO-aligned audit.
- Adopt the "3-Tier" Correction Model:
 - Correction: Fix the immediate problem (e.g., mop up the spill).
 - Root Cause Action: Fix the process (e.g., repair the leaking GSE valve).
 - Contributing Factor Mitigation: Fix the environment (e.g., update the GSE pre-departure inspection checklist to specifically look for that leak type).
- Use ISAGO as the "What," EASA as the "How": Use ISAGO (GOSARPs) to define the operational standard but use EASA AMC (Acceptable Means of Compliance) to define the depth of the investigation.

The Impact of the 2026 Transition

As we are currently in February 2026, GHSPs are performing "Gap Analyses." The shift from "Self-Regulation" to "EASA Oversight" means that National Aviation Authorities (NAAs) will now be auditing your investigation skills.

If an NAA inspector sees a "Root Cause" identified as "Human Error" without an analysis of the "Contributing Factors" (fatigue, training gap, equipment design), they will likely reject the Declaration of Capability or issue a Finding.

Why Compliance Training is No Longer Optional

Under the new rules, training is no longer a "one-off" induction event. The regulations introduce several mandates that make robust compliance training a legal necessity:

- **Mandatory Safety Management Systems (SMS):** All Ground Handling Service Providers (GHSPs) must now implement a full SMS. Personnel must be trained in hazard identification, risk reporting, and safety culture.
- **Continuous Competence:** The "set and forget" qualification model is dead. EASA now requires evidence of ongoing competence, meaning training programs must include regular assessments and role-specific proficiency checks.
- **Management Accountability:** Post-holders and compliance managers are now legally accountable. Training must ensure they understand their liabilities under Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 and the new delegated acts.

Why the Sofema "Compliance, Root Cause & Investigation" Package fits here:

This training package specifically addresses this "Reconciliation" by teaching investigators how to move beyond the simple "Why" and into the systemic "How." It bridges the gap between the IATA operational world and the EASA legal world.

Core Pillars of the New Training Curriculum

To meet 2026-2028 requirements, organizations must update their training syllabi to include:

- **SMS & Safety Culture:** Focusing on reporting without fear of penalty (Just Culture), mandatory for all staff levels.
- **Inter-Stakeholder Coordination:** Integrating with airport and airline SMS, essential for "Total System" safety.
- **Ground Support Equipment (GSE):** Maintenance and safe operation to prevent aircraft damage, standardized across EU member states.
- **Cybersecurity (EU 2022/1645):** Protecting operational data and load sheets, a new mandatory requirement for Ground Handling.
- **Language Proficiency:** Minimum proficiency levels defined for clear communication during safety-critical ramp tasks.

Raise Your Professional Standards with Sofema Online

Ground operations function under continuous time pressure, high human-factor exposure, and complex coordination demands. In this environment, superficial investigations and weak compliance oversight inevitably result in repeated findings and regulatory vulnerability.

Join the **40,000 enrollments recorded last year** and ensure your organization is ready for the EASA transition with our cost-effective, high-impact training solutions.

Featured: Compliance, Root Cause & Investigation Skills for Ground Operations Package

This structured regulatory and practical competence development program is designed specifically for the operational realities of ground handling. It integrates Compliance Monitoring, structured Root Cause Analysis, and Practical Investigation Skills into a coherent development pathway.

This Comprehensive Package Includes:

- **Compliance Monitoring for Ground Operations and Ground Handling:** Examine the regulatory framework and translate requirements into practical oversight, risk-based audits, and management of subcontracted activities.
- **Root Cause Analysis for Managers, Quality, and Safety (SMS) Practitioners:** Develop disciplined RCA capability to challenge superficial conclusions and identify systemic contributors.
- **Practical Investigation Skills for Safety & Quality Practitioners (Initial):** Master investigation planning, evidence preservation, interview techniques, and professional report writing capable of withstanding EASA scrutiny.

Investment in Excellence:

- Individual Course Total: 405.00 EUR
- Special Package Price: 305.00 EUR (Save 100.00 EUR)

Next Steps

Please see www.sofemaonline.com website, review the following course or email team@sassofia.com

<https://sofemaonline.com/lms/all-courses/601-compliance-root-cause-amp-investigation-skills-for-ground-operations-package>