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Special cargo and the NOTOC in air cargo

Which codes are used in air cargo for live animals, human remains, human organs and dangerous goods, and what is the written information to the pilot-in-command on dangerous goods (the NOTOC) based on?

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Online interactive version: **https://ozgurkonakci.com/en/guide/air-cargo-special-cargo-notoc/**

SHORT ANSWER

In IATA's ONE Record code lists, AVI means live animal, HUM human remains in coffin, LHO living human organs/blood, ICE dry ice and PER perishable cargo. When dangerous goods are carried, the operator gives the pilot-in-command written information on them; in the industry this is known as the NOTOC. Its basis is Part 7;4.1 of the ICAO Technical Instructions; in the 67th edition of the IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations it is covered in 9.5.1.1. Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, when there were live animals, organs or dangerous goods, we had the forms needed to inform the pilot prepared and signed by the officials.

A short note first

This page gives a general account of special cargo in air freight and of the written information given to the pilot-in-command about dangerous goods (the NOTOC); it does not name airlines. Sentences marked "between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal" or "the practice at the time" describe the author's experience in those years, not today's rules. Today's codes and rules are given separately from IATA and ICAO sources and US regulations. Dangerous goods classes, documents and packaging are not repeated here; a link to the relevant topic is given instead. Sources are listed at the end of the page.

Special cargo: the practice at the time

How export cargo moves from acceptance to the aircraft, ULD build-up and loading supervision are covered in **Air cargo export: from acceptance to aircraft loading**. This page covers special cargo (live animals, human remains, human organs and dangerous goods) and the written information given to the pilot-in-command about dangerous goods.

Between 1998 and 2000, working at an airport cargo terminal, we also handled this work for special cargo in export shipments:

1. **Informing the pilot:** When there were live animals, organs or dangerous goods, we had the forms needed to inform the pilot prepared and signed by the officials.
2. **Human remains shipments:** Human remains shipments were also special cargo that often called for special attention.

This list describes the practice at the time. Today's codes and rules are given below with their sources.

Special handling codes: AVI, HUM, LHO, ICE, PER

In IATA's ONE Record code lists (2026-07 standard), the special handling codes include:

- **AVI**: live animal.
- **HUM**: human remains in coffin.
- **LHO**: living human organs/blood.
- **ICE**: dry ice.
- **PER**: perishable cargo.

The code lists ontology describes this list as corresponding to list 1.16 (Special Handling Codes) of the cXML code lists.

Live animals: the IATA LAR

According to IATA's live animals programme page, the IATA Live Animals Regulations (LAR) are the worldwide standard for transporting live animals by commercial airlines.

The LAR publication page lists the scope of its documentation section as: shipper's certification, waybill, captain notification, CITES documents, other documents and the live animal acceptance checklist. So for live animals, captain notification is one of the subjects covered in the documentation section of the LAR. Ask the airline or the ground handling agent what the notification contains and what form it takes.

Human remains and human organs

In IATA's code lists, human remains in coffin are coded HUM and living human organs or blood LHO.

Between 1998 and 2000, while we were working at an airport cargo terminal, human remains shipments were special cargo that often called for special attention. When there were organs, too, we had the forms needed to inform the pilot prepared and signed by the officials. This was the practice at the time.

Ask the airline or the ground handling agent how human remains and organ shipments are notified to the pilot-in-command today and on what conditions they are accepted.

The NOTOC: written information to the pilot-in-command on dangerous goods

The basis for the information given to the pilot-in-command when dangerous goods are carried is Part 7;4.1 of the ICAO Technical Instructions. These provisions require the operator to give the pilot-in-command written information on dangerous goods carried as cargo on the aircraft; in the industry this information is known as the **NOTOC**. The pilot-in-command indicates receipt of the information.

In the IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations (IATA DGR), provision of information to the pilot-in-command (NOTOC) is in 9.5.1.1 of the 67th edition.

According to the Technical Instructions text quoted in a 2016 working paper of the ICAO Dangerous Goods Panel, the written information must be legible and should be presented on a dedicated form, not by means of air waybills, dangerous goods transport documents or invoices. That paper is an amendment proposal to allow the information to the pilot-in-command to be provided as data. Ask the airline or the ground handling agent in what medium the information is given today.

Dangerous goods classes, UN numbers, declarations and packaging are covered in **Dangerous goods transport: IMDG and ADR**.

The loader's confirmation: the US rule

Under the US rule (49 CFR 175.33), the information provided to the pilot-in-command must also include a signed confirmation or some other indication from the person responsible for loading the aircraft that there was no evidence of any damage to or leakage from the packages or any leakage from the ULDs loaded on the aircraft.

This rule is in US regulations. Ask the airline or the ground handling agent how the loader's confirmation is obtained in other countries. Loading supervision and the supervisor's signature under EU rules are covered in the Loading supervision and mass and balance documentation section.

Test yourself

1. In IATA's ONE Record code lists, what do the HUM and LHO codes mean? *(Answer: HUM means human remains in coffin, LHO living human organs/blood.)*
2. In the 67th edition of the IATA DGR, which paragraph covers provision of information to the pilot-in-command (NOTOC)? *(Answer: 9.5.1.1.)*
3. Under the US rule (49 CFR 175.33), what confirmation from the person responsible for loading does the information to the pilot-in-command include? *(Answer: A signed confirmation or some other indication that there was no evidence of damage to or leakage from the packages or leakage from the ULDs.)*

Frequently asked questions

What do AVI, HUM and LHO mean?
They are special handling codes in IATA's ONE Record code lists (2026-07 standard): AVI means live animal, HUM human remains in coffin and LHO living human organs/blood. In the same list, ICE means dry ice and PER perishable cargo.

What is the NOTOC and what is it based on?

It is the written information the operator gives the pilot-in-command on dangerous goods carried on the aircraft. Its basis is Part 7;4.1 of the ICAO Technical Instructions; in the 67th edition of the IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations it is covered in 9.5.1.1. The pilot-in-command indicates receipt of the information.

Can an air waybill or invoice be used to inform the pilot-in-command?

According to the Technical Instructions text quoted in a 2016 working paper of the ICAO Dangerous Goods Panel, the written information must be legible and should be presented on a dedicated form, not by means of air waybills, dangerous goods transport documents or invoices. Ask the airline or the ground handling agent how the information is given today.

Which IATA regulations apply to carrying live animals?

According to IATA, the IATA Live Animals Regulations (LAR) are the worldwide standard for transporting live animals by commercial airlines. According to its publication page, the documentation section of the LAR also covers captain notification.

SOURCES

IATA — ONE Record Code Lists Ontology, 2026-07 standard (special handling codes) — https://github.com/IATA-Cargo/ONE-Record/blob/master/2026-07-standard/Data-Model/IATA-1R-CL-Ontology.ttl
IATA — Live Animals programme page — https://www.iata.org/en/programs/cargo/live-animals/
IATA — Live Animals Regulations (LAR) publication page — https://www.iata.org/en/publications/manuals/live-animals-regulations/
ICAO Dangerous Goods Panel — DGP-WG/16-WP/2: Allowance for the information to the pilot-in-command as data (29/8/2016) — https://www.icao.int/sites/default/files/DangerousGoods/DGP%20Meeting%20Documentation/WG16/DGPWG.16.WP.002.2.en.pdf
IATA — Dangerous Goods Regulations 67th Edition, Addendum, 1 January 2026 — https://www.iata.org/contentassets/90f8038b0eea42069554b2f4530f49ea/dgr-67-addendum-1—-en—-01-january-2026.pdf
eCFR (US Code of Federal Regulations) — 49 CFR § 175.33: Shipping paper and information to the pilot-in-command — https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/section-175.33

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