SAFA Ramp Checks: The Findings Nobody Briefs You On

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Key Points

- **SAFA inspectors are checking more than the familiar "top findings".** Recent guidance has expanded what inspectors are told to look for, even though the core inspection categories remain unchanged.
- **Some of the easiest findings to avoid are also the least talked about**, including EFBs, MEL customization, maintenance due dates, approvals, briefing cards and placards.
- **Need a checklist?** We've included our trusty printable SAFA checklist below. If you'd rather work electronically, check out SAFA+Checklist, an app that guides you through the inspection and generates a PDF report when you're done.

You already know the greatest hits. **Most SAFA articles list the same top findings: damaged tires, missing documents, out-of-date charts.** Fair enough – they top the statistics every year.

But the inspector walking up your airstairs isn't just working from a top-five list. They're working from the full EASA Ramp Inspection Guidance Material, and recent revisions have quietly added new items and expanded the inspection instructions on existing ones. **Here's a tour of the findings that are completely fair game but rarely make the crew briefing…**

First, know which flavour of inspection you're getting

"Ramp Inspection" covers more than one program. **SAFA** applies to third-country operators against ICAO standards, while **SACA** applies to EASA operators under the EU regulatory framework. Commercial operators receive most of the attention, but **business aviation is routinely inspected as well.** Whether you're operating a scheduled airliner or a privately operated business jet, the knock on the flight

deck door can come just the same.

Flying past an inspection due point (A22-04)

Inspectors can and do ask for **maintenance docs showing when the next scheduled inspection is due** – and compare it against your hours and cycles. If the paperwork shows you're operating past a due inspection, that's a finding on overdue maintenance, and not a small one.

The easy defense: have maintenance insert a computer run of next-due items in the aircraft documents, or verify that the next-due blocks in the logbook are filled in, accurate, and compliant. Either way, know where your aircraft sits against its next check before someone in a high-vis vest works it out for you.

Placards: the cheapest finding on the airplane (A01-20)

Missing or unreadable markings and placards. That's it. A worn NO STEP, a faded EXIT marking, or a placard that peeled off during the last wash. It takes an inspector seconds to spot and earns an unnecessary line on the report. Walk your aircraft occasionally and read what a stranger would read.

EFBs: the mount, the wires, and the backup (A06 / A03-08)

The inspection guidance for Electronic Flight Bags has expanded considerably. **Inspectors are specifically instructed to verify that the EFB is properly secured during critical phases of flight.**

Whether permanently mounted or secured in an approved viewable stowage location, the EFB must not obstruct flight controls, cockpit equipment, emergency equipment, or emergency exits. If it isn't adequately secured, expect the inspector to ask about your operator's policy. **"It sits on my lap" isn't an acceptable answer.**

The stowage requirement also creates a trap. If a portable EFB must be stowed during takeoff or landing and it is your only source of approach charts, inspectors may cite A06-06 – required charts not available during critical phases of flight – a Category 3 finding. **Mount the EFB or carry an independent backup.**

Inspectors also **verify that operators have a backup** for critical Type-B EFB applications such as the Operations Manual, AFM, checklists, charts, performance software, and weight-and-balance calculations. A second independent EFB or hard-copy backup satisfies the requirement. One tablet carrying everything does not.

The MEL: customization is not optional (A07)

MEL findings often feel like an operator problem – until the inspector is standing on the flight deck asking questions. **Inspectors look beyond whether the MEL is on board.** It must be current, reflect the equipment actually installed on the aircraft, include the required (M) and (O) procedures, and deferred defects must comply with its instructions.

Just as important, the MEL must be fully customized. Simply adding your aircraft registration to a generic MMEL isn't enough. If your MEL lists equipment your aircraft has never carried – or omits equipment it does have – expect a finding.

Fuel and performance: extra gas can bite you (A13)

Here's one that surprises many crews. **Carrying more fuel than planned is perfectly acceptable – as long as it's reflected in your weight-and-balance and performance calculations.** If you tanker extra fuel but use the original fuel load for takeoff performance calculations, the finding isn't about fuel. It's about incorrect performance and weight-and-balance calculations.

Inspectors are also instructed to **verify that fuel planning meets ICAO and EASA requirements**, including approach manoeuvering and the route to the alternate. Fuel consumption monitoring should be conducted according to your approved procedures. If no procedures exist, that can become an Operations Manual finding.

Another item often overlooked is **Rescue and Fire Fighting Services (RFFS).** Your Operations Manual establishes the required RFFS category, but someone still has to verify the destination airport actually provides that category on the day of the flight. It's easy to assume a smaller airport can accommodate a large business jet – but assumptions don't satisfy inspectors.

Finally, expect inspectors to **verify that the crew reviewed current weather for both the destination and alternates** and confirmed forecast conditions remain above the applicable operating minima.

Do your approvals match your avionics?

Avionics upgrades happen constantly. Every software load, navigation capability upgrade, or equipment modification is another opportunity for the paperwork to drift away from the airplane.

Make sure your flight plan equipment codes, LOAs, and OpSpecs match the equipment actually installed. For example, operators flying into LFMN/Nice may require separate authorizations for arrivals, RNP approaches, and DA minima. The chart won't remind you – but an inspector might.

Even with the proper approvals, always review current Notams. Some European airports have temporarily suspended LPV approaches because of navigation-system limitations, so today's authorized approach may not be available tomorrow.

Down the back: cabin findings inspectors still catch (B01, B03, B06, B10, B11)

Unsecured baggage is an easy finding. Loose bags in the cabin are written up under B13, but if they obstruct an emergency exit, the finding becomes more serious.

Passenger briefing cards deserve a closer look than many operators give them. They must accurately reflect the aircraft configuration, be readily available, and contain picture-type instructions. Just as important, every piece of emergency equipment shown on the card must actually be where the card says it is. Cabin modifications have a habit of leaving briefing cards behind.

Inspectors also pay attention to seatbelts. Frayed webbing or damaged restraints may be considered unserviceable, making this one of the easiest findings to prevent with a routine cabin inspection.

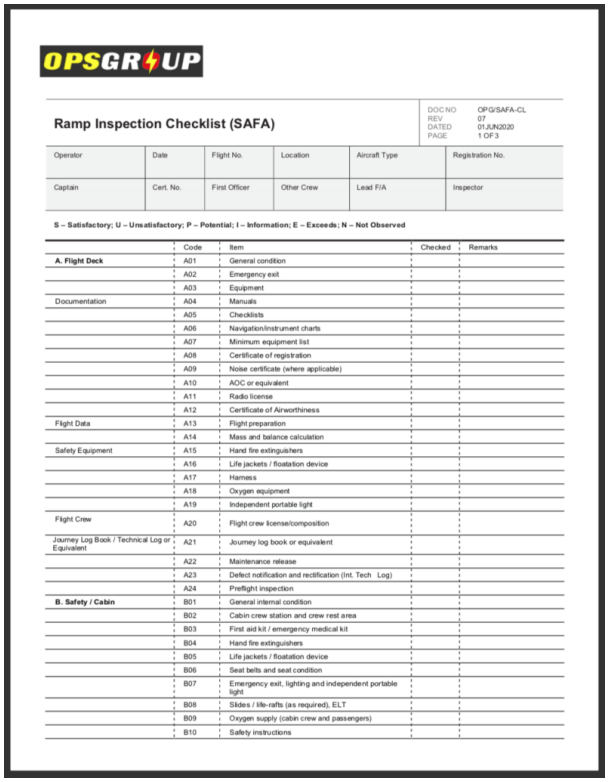
Bottom line

None of this is exotic. **It's maintenance due dates, placards, EFB mounting, MEL customization, performance calculations, approvals, briefing cards, and seatbelts.** The annual "top findings" receive most of the attention because they're common – but inspectors are working from the entire checklist, not just the statistics. The more familiar your crews are with those inspection items before arriving in Europe, the faster and smoother the inspection is likely to be.

Want a checklist?

The good news is that the core EASA ramp inspection checklist hasn't changed much over the past few years. **The same five sections (Flight Deck, Cabin, Aircraft Condition, Cargo and General) and the same inspection items are still used today.** The big changes have been in the inspector guidance behind those items – what inspectors are told to verify, what questions to ask, and what now constitutes a finding.

If you just want a printable checklist, you can download a PDF copy of the OPSGROUP SAFA Ramp Inspection Checklist here.



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Ramp Inspection Checklist (SAFA)

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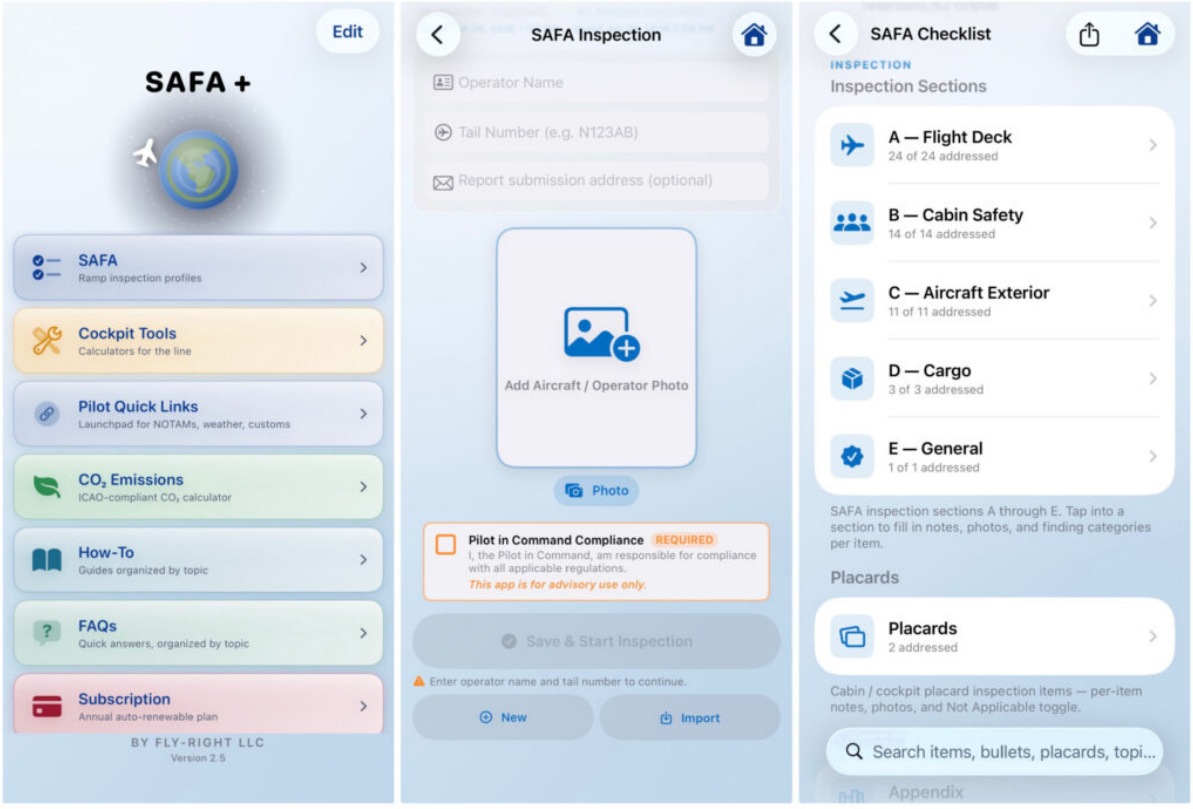
Operator	Date	Flight No.	Location	Aircraft Type	Registration No.
Captain	Cert. No.	First Officer	Other Crew	Lead F/A	Inspector

S – Satisfactory; U – Unsatisfactory; P – Potential; I – Information; E – Exceeds; N – Not Observed

	Code	Item	Checked	Remarks
A. Flight Deck	A01	General condition		
	A02	Emergency exit		
	A03	Equipment		
Documentation	A04	Manuals		
	A05	Checklists		
	A06	Navigation/instrument charts		
	A07	Minimum equipment list		
	A08	Certificate of registration		
	A09	Noise certificate (where applicable)		
	A10	AOC or equivalent		
	A11	Radio license		
	A12	Certificate of Airworthiness		
Flight Data	A13	Flight preparation		
	A14	Mass and balance calculation		
Safety Equipment	A15	Hand fire extinguishers		
	A16	Life jackets / floatation device		
	A17	Harness		
	A18	Oxygen equipment		
	A19	Independent portable light		
Flight Crew	A20	Flight crew license/composition		
Journey Log Book / Technical Log or Equivalent	A21	Journey log book or equivalent		
	A22	Maintenance release		
	A23	Defect notification and rectification (Int. Tech Log)		
	A24	Preflight inspection		
B. Safety / Cabin	B01	General internal condition		
	B02	Cabin crew station and crew rest area		
	B03	First aid kit / emergency medical kit		
	B04	Hand fire extinguishers		
	B05	Life jackets / floatation device		
	B06	Seat belts and seat condition		
	B07	Emergency exit, lighting and independent portable light		
	B08	Slides / life-rafts (as required), ELT		
	B09	Oxygen supply (cabin crew and passengers)		
	B10	Safety instructions		

But if you'd rather **prepare electronically** instead of working from a paper checklist, check out SAFA+Checklist – an app built by an OPSGROUP member that walks you through the inspection on your iPad, keeps everything an inspector might ask for in one place, and generates a PDF report when you're done.



Thanks to Scott Moore from Fly-Right for help with this article! Fly-Right has developed SAFA readiness tools for international business aviation since 2016. Founded by an active International captain, the company created SAFA+ checklist-an iOS application that puts the complete EASA SAFA checklist, operator-specific documentation, expiration tracking, cockpit calculators, and carbon emissions tracking in the crews' hands at every ramp.