Buyer’s Guide to Cold-Chain Shipping

Compiling a list of critical factors for your cargo is key in evaluating the effectiveness of a transport service provider in meeting your needs. Guidance set forth in the Parenteral Drug Association’s Technical Report 39 urges the following considerations when hiring a transport service provider to maintain cold-chain shipping. The questions you should ask of your carrier are:

1.) Do you, as the shipper, have an agreement with the transport service provider verifying their ability to maintain temperature controls?
2.) Are you able to audit the transport service provider concerning their quality controls? Will the carrier provide you with quality statistics for your on-time delivery, temperature excursions and claims/loss history?
3.) Does the transport service provider have a quality management system? Is there a specific individual responsible for quality management?
4.) Has the transport service provider implemented a tracking and tracing system that not only tracks the cargo location but monitors temperature as well?
5.) Regarding temperature measurements, what is the transport service provider’s monitoring method, the sensitivity of temperature measurements and the frequency of temperature readings?
6.) Does the transport service provider have a contingency plan in the event that a cold-chain shipment fails to maintain temperature control? What is their reaction speed in determining a failure and implementing a contingency?
7.) Does the transport service provider provide training to its personnel and subcontractors concerning appropriate care of temperature-controlled cargo? Is that training documented?
8.) Will you be informed in advance of any changes that materially affect the terms of transport?
9.) If the transport service provider utilizes a subcontractor, do the subcontractor and the service provider have a transport agreement verifying their ability to maintain temperature control? Does the subcontractor adhere to the same quality management system as the transport provider?

A final note: Cost control is of interest to nearly every decision-maker. In evaluating the cost of temperature-controlled shipping, consider also the cost of your past losses, excursion management expenses (including quarantine delays) and packaging costs. Also consider the sensitivity of the freight, your tolerance for loss and the quality assurance/regulatory environment. It may be that the most cost-effective solution does not have the least cost per mile or per weight.