



Your voice **matters**



Why consumers
need to participate
in standards-
making
... **and how to get
involved**



ISO in brief



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ISO is the International Organization for Standardization. It has a membership of 147 national standards institutes from countries large and small, industrialized and developing, in all regions of the world.

ISO develops voluntary technical standards which add value to all types of business operations. They contribute to making the development, manufacturing and supply of products and services more efficient, safer and cleaner.

They make trade between countries easier and fairer. ISO standards also safeguard users and consumers and make many aspects of their lives simpler.

ISO develops only those standards that are required by the market. This work is carried out by experts coming from the industrial, technical and business sectors which have asked for the standards and which subsequently put them to use. These experts may be joined by others with relevant knowledge, such as representatives of government agencies, consumer organizations, academia and testing laboratories.

Published under the designation of International Standards, ISO standards represent an international consensus on the state of the art in the technology or activity concerned.

Why standards are important for consumers

- Have you ever wondered why you can use your bank card anywhere in the world?
- Or been thankful that the dashboard symbols in the Japanese car you have hired in Australia or Thailand are the same as in your own French car at home in Norway?
- Or that you can watch video footage (MPEG) delivered via the Web on any of the different computers you have access to?
- Or noticed that your baby's toy has no sharp edges?

Because they comply with technical specifications which have been codified into voluntary agreements, called **standards**.

In today's increasingly global manufacturing and trading environment, consumers expect to benefit from a wider choice of goods and services, lower prices and more information. They want the purchases they make to be of quality, easy to use, safe and friendly to the environment.

Standards are one vital tool for reaching these objectives ... because they are developed within an open process that provides the opportunity for all stakeholders, *including consumers*, to express their views and to have those views considered.

This is a key principle of consensus-based standardization within the International Organization for Standardization (ISO),



for it ensures the fairness and effectiveness of the standards ... and confidence in their use.

Standards are an integral element of consumer protection, as they often underpin national legislation and certification schemes.



Through a transparent and consensual development process, standards improve products and services by enhancing :

- Quality and reliability
- Protection of safety and health
- Compatibility between products
- Consistency in the delivery of services
- Greater choice of goods and services
- Transparent product information
- Lower costs and greater competition, hence lower prices for consumers
- Suitability of products for vulnerable populations (children, the elderly)
- Environmental protection



What are standards ?

Standards are agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines, or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose. When such agreements are international, they become “International Standards”.

For example, the format of the credit cards, phone cards, and machine-readable cards that have become commonplace is derived from an ISO International Standard. Because manufacturers throughout the world apply the same standard, these cards can be used everywhere.



Standards contribute to making life simpler, and to increasing the reliability and effectiveness of the goods and services we use.





Why standards benefit from consumers' input

Standardization allows consumers to have confidence in the quality and reliability of the products and services that they purchase. That level of confidence increases significantly with consumer participation in the standardization process.

Consumers can contribute in many ways :

- By providing data on safety aspects and ensuring that safety is properly addressed
- By giving examples of how products and services are actually used (or misused) in practice
- By checking that the performance requirements and test methods reflect the way products and services are actually used.

Consumers lend their unique perspective to the creation of the voluntary standards that govern the manufacture of many of the products and the structure of services used in everyday life.

Standards ? They're technical documents for technicians...

Oh, really ?

In fact, precisely because they can be technical documents (though not all are), your input as the consumer is especially vital, particularly for standards affecting consumer products.

The most technically advanced video recorder can become a nightmare if inadequate or confusing instructions make it difficult to operate.





A cooker is not acceptable if there are significant safety hazards when it is used.

If an individual retirement savings plan cannot easily be compared to other alternatives, it is unattractive – and risky.

The list goes on and on...

How useful a product or service is depends on the user – the ultimate judge.

How do consumers participate in standards development ?

Nationally...

It depends on how the national standards body (NSB) in your country is structured and how it channels consumer views into its work. The national standards body may be either a private association or a governmental agency, and it may have its own department of consumer protection. The way consumers' views are channelled into national standardization depends on the history, culture and infrastructure of the country.

In some countries, national standards bodies seek the views of consumers by involving one or more national consumer associations both in general





policy-making and in national standards development work. The national standards body (NSB) may also have its own consumer policy staff.

In other countries, the consumer's involvement may be differently arranged, or may be much less well-developed, as national standards bodies do not always fully engage the consumer view. ISO has developed a policy statement (ISO/IEC Statement on consumer participation in standardization work), which aims to help NSBs incorporate consumers' views in standards development. To support this, ISO's Committee on consumer policy is developing training and supporting materials.

More information on how best to contribute at the national level appears on page 9.

Internationally...

ISO coordinates its consumer policy through the ISO Committee on Consumer Policy (ISO/COPOLCO). COPOLCO members are NSBs which are members of ISO and which designate a person who is responsible for consumer liaison at this level. This person usually comes from the NSB, but may come from an NSB-appointed national consumer association.

When an International Standard is developed, the national standards bodies work at the international level as members of ISO. Influencing the approach or content of International Standards, therefore, starts at the national level.

In addition, international consumer associations sometimes participate directly in technical work. For example, Consumers International (CI) helps to channel



consumers' views into standardization over a wide geographic area.

CI representatives participate in some international technical committees (in areas of particular interest to consumers) within ISO, and within ISO's partner: the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). CI also provides support to its members at the national level.



How ISO helps – COPOLCO

ISO/COPOLCO is the Consumer Policy Committee of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Through this Committee, ISO undertakes to:

- Make COPOLCO's services available to national standards bodies worldwide
- Support its members in developing consumer participation in standards-making
- Study how consumers can benefit from standardization
- Promote the positive role of standards in consumer protection
- Encourage the exchange of experience on standards work of consumer interest
- Channel consumers' views both into current standards projects and proposals for new work in areas of interest to them.

For more information, please contact the ISO Central Secretariat (central@iso.org).



What consumer representatives do



A consumer representative participates in meetings of national or international technical committees where standards are developed.

The consumer representative's role is to ensure that the standards being developed address issues of concern to consumers. These may include some of the following: health, safety, performance, ergonomics, quality, reliability, comfort, environmental protection, ease-of-use, compatibility and interoperability.

No particular background is required – though an interest in, and some knowledge of, the subject area is helpful – just a willingness to read and understand the issues, and get their voices heard by *participating*.



Where do I begin ?

1) Contact your *national consumers' association*

Consumer associations often cooperate with national standards bodies, or with larger consumer groups, or both (see below).

If not, encourage your consumer association to do so !

2) Contact the *ISO member body in your country*

This body is the representative national standards body of your country. Contact details are available on ISO's Web site, ISO Online (www.iso.org), or by contacting the ISO Central Secretariat (central.iso.org).

3) Contact *international and regional consumer associations*

Consumers International is the worldwide organization for consumer groups (www.consumersinternational.org).

In Europe, the European Association for the Coordination of Consumer Representation in Standardization (ANEC) is a regional association representing consumers in standardization (www.anec.org).

4) Contact the *ISO Committee on Consumer policy* (COPOLCO)

This Committee's activity is described on ISO Online (www.iso.org – *Consumer issues* section). Other useful publications and references are also available there.



Where consumers have made a difference



Within national standards bodies :

“ I have participated in technical discussions within my national standards body for over 10 years. At the beginning, my knowledge of standards was limited to technical aspects only and I did not understand the importance of standards for consumers.

The first thing that I did was to go to the national standards body for help : for appropriate books, the procedures of discussion and advice on my role in the process. Little by little, I developed personal relationships with the NSB staff responsible for different areas. I participated in various technical committees, dealing with such areas as electrical appliances, toys, lighters, fire

extinguishers, baby bottles, pacifiers, and food delivery services. My colleagues and I have always enjoyed good discussions, with mutual respect for each other’s positions.

For me, participation not only involves the meetings, but also interacting in partnership with the NSB at a policy level. It helps to have good personal relationships, persistence, curiosity, some technical knowledge and a lot of common sense.

There have been many small breakthroughs in the form of better instructions and warnings, more adequate test methods, reference levels, and so on. Goals can be achieved if you are willing to adapt your strategy. It is not always



necessary to state a position outright ; it is sometimes sufficient to convince one or two other members of the committee of your views.”

— *A consumer representative from ADELCO, a consumer organization working with the standards body of Argentina (IRAM).*

...in technical committees at the national level :

... for PEN CAPS

“In the late 1980s, following the death of a young child in the United Kingdom due to the inhalation of a pen cap, a Member of Parliament asked the Government to take action. This was not the first death – there had been nine in the preceding 15 years.

As chair of a committee established by the British Standards Institution to address the subject, I was able to ensure that the scope of the standard reflected the needs of the consumer, that the test methods replicated the hazard and appropriate performance criteria were set. It was necessary to balance the sometimes competing demands of the manufacturers and the researchers, to produce a specification that provided acceptable safety for children.

The standard, first published in 1990 (BS 7272), provides requirements for the safety of pen caps and associated test methods. In simple terms, caps must



be too large to be inhaled (as with thick marker pens), or have a clear air passage along their length, or pass an airflow test.”

Since the publication of this standard, no deaths due to inhalation of pen caps have been recorded in the United Kingdom.

— *A consumer representative on a national committee*

This British Standard subsequently became an International Standard, **ISO 11540:1993**, *Caps for writing and marking instruments intended for use by children up to 14 years of age – Safety requirements.*

... for UV PROTECTION IN CLOTHING

“The initiative for a British standard on ultra-violet protection in clothes (**BS 7949**) came from consumers. There had been concern in Australia that some garments that gave adequate body cover and were worn to give protection from the sun did not protect against ultra-violet (UV) radiation. The consumer or shopper had no means of knowing which gave protection and which did not.



My practical experience as a Northern European mother who has travelled with young children to sunnier places, coupled with the resources available to representatives from the UK Consumer Policy Committee, have enabled me to contribute successfully to this standard for clothing.

The standard has been particularly implemented in the UK for children's beach wear. It includes test methods and performance criteria for UV permeability of clothing fabrics, and so can help protect wearers from the harmful rays of the sun. Without a consumer input, it is probable that little progress would have been made, given the initial lack of enthusiasm by clothing manufacturers."

— A consumer representative
on a national committee

... for PRAMS and PUSHCHAIRS (STROLLERS)

"I have been involved as a consumer representative in drafting safety standards for prams and pushchairs both nationally and at the European level. Previous practical experience of testing such items made me appreciate the need for clear, unambiguous standards, especially when safety issues are addressed.

I am also a mother with three children, two of whom are twins, and so I also understood the consumer's needs and expectations.

These include needs for :

- Stability
- Adequate brakes (even on a hill)
- Strong and durable frame





- An effective harness mechanism to prevent falls, and
- Clear labelling and instructions.

I obtained hazard data and other information to support my position on satisfactory performance levels, and eventually standards were agreed which addressed all the issues adequately.

Another role I have as a consumer representative is to bring to the attention of the committee innovations that, if safe, can make life easier for the consumer. Over the years, manufacturers of these goods have become much more receptive and I believe now welcome the consumer contribution in standardization. After all, if it pleases the customer it is likely to sell well!”

— *A consumer representative on a national committee*

In technical committees at the regional level:

... for LADDERS:

“The European standard for ladders (**EN 131**) only included specifications suitable for industrial ladders such as those used on construction sites. However, many ladders on sale in Europe and aimed at other users, including the ‘Do It Yourself’ and home market, do not meet this standard and are considered to be unsafe or to have poor durability. Ladders that do meet the standard are heavy and potentially dangerous to use by householders who may not be strong enough to move and use the ladders safely.

Campaigning at a political level and active consumer participation in the European standards committee have resulted in a revised standard which will recognize two categories of ladder : one suitable for



industrial use and one for domestic use. They will have the same performance and safety requirements but different requirements for durability.

Consumers wanted the revised standard to be “performance-based”, rather than to specify precise materials or dimensions such as thickness of metal parts. This was to allow greater innovation to produce lighter-weight ladders in future, but that still meet the performance criteria. The future revision will contribute greatly to specifying ladders for domestic use that are safe and fit for purpose.”

— *A Consumer representative involved in standards-making at the European level (ANEC)*

... for LIFEJACKETS and BUOYANCY AIDS

“By the time international standardization of life jackets and buoyancy aids started in the late 1980’s, the Nordic consumer agencies had already had their common safety guidelines for these items for more than a decade.



Nordic representatives were therefore concerned when the convenor of the working group for a new standard for lifejackets indicated early in the process that only the highest possible safety level of these garments was acceptable.

The consumer representatives, however, felt that the new safety standards should also





include criteria such as comfort, fashion and various practical features so that fishermen, canoers, water skiers and others would be more inclined to use this equipment.

This basic change in philosophy was the crucial factor that paved the way for new product development. It was considered better to have equipment with less stringent safety requirements that is actually used, rather than equipment with maximum safety requirements that is cumbersome and therefore not used. As a result, there are now three consumer standards for lifejackets and buoyancy aids ([EN 393](#), [EN 395](#) and [EN 396](#)), together representing various levels of safety and thereby stimulating the use of an important type of protective equipment.”

— *A consumer representative on a European committee*

Under the terms of a common agreement between CEN, the European Committee for Standardization, and ISO, these standards are also being developed as International Standards ([ISO 12402-3.2](#), [12402-4.2](#), and [12402-5.2](#)).

...and at the international level...

for COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN ORGANIZATIONS:

“I am a member of an ISO working group which is writing an international standard for organizations on complaints handling ([ISO 10018](#), *Complaints handling — Guidelines for organizations*). This International Standard, which links with the ISO 9000 family of international



quality management standards, will be relevant to organizations of all sizes and types. The standard will help to ensure that customers get their problems sorted out promptly and efficiently and that organizations get valuable feedback on their products and services. This in turn, should lead to improvements that benefit customers.

As a consumer representative, I have been able to help ensure that the standard considers the needs of all consumers, including those who, owing to a visual or hearing impairment, for example, need information provided in a different way. My own experience of implementing a complaints handling system in a national health service has helped to keep the document relevant to both non-commercial providers of services and the more obvious suppliers

of consumer goods. Consumers are sometimes criticized for “doing nothing but complain”, but there is satisfaction in doing this at an international level, knowing that both consumers and providers of goods and services will benefit!”

— A consumer representative representing Consumers International (CI)





Educational and informational resources for consumer representatives:

Some good basic information can be found on ISO Online at www.iso.org (see *Communities and markets / Consumer issues*).

Furthermore, some national standards bodies and affiliated consumer associations have specialized Web sites. A few examples appear in the consumer issues section of ISO Online.



Two URLs to remember

ISO Online

www.iso.org

ISO Café

www.iso.org/isocafe





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