

Getting water to all: ISO/TC 224 studies how to optimize water supply

by Laurence Thomas, Secretary ISO/TC 224, Service activities relating to drinking water supply systems and wastewater systems – Quality criteria of the service and performance indicators, AFNOR, France

Water is a worldwide challenge for the 21st century, especially for developing countries.

The United Nations in 2000 recognized that access to water is an essential human right and, in conjunction with national governments, it set ambitious objectives to achieve it as part of the Millennium Development Goals. Two years later, during the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, the UN declared that the provision of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation was a necessity and they agreed to halve, by the year 2015, the number of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water and the number of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.

It was in this context that ISO/TC 224 was launched in 2001 to provide guidelines for service activities relating to the management of drinking water supply systems and wastewater systems. These guidelines are designed to help water authorities and their operators achieve a level of quality that best meets the expectations of consumers and the principle of sustainable development.

The standards are for use and implementation in industrialized as well as developing countries, in big cities or small towns and in rural areas.



The participation of developing countries in ISO/TC 224 work is therefore essential.

The technical committee at present includes 25 Participating countries (P-members) and 18 Observer countries (O-members). Seven of the P-members are developing countries: Argentina, Morocco, Malaysia and Nigeria have been involved in the work from the beginning and attended the TC meetings, while Tunisia, Kenya and Zimbabwe have become P-members in recent weeks. The wish of the chairmanship and secretariat is to increase the number of developing countries in order to prepare globally relevant standards.

Regional fora

To ensure the broadest possible exchange and dissemination of information, and to strengthen the participation of developing and “emerging” countries (ISO members and non-members) in the standardization work, three regional fora were organized in 2004. The objective was to collect comments and proposals from

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these countries on the standards under development.

- The first forum was held in April 2004, in parallel with the ISO/TC 224 plenary meeting in the Republic of Korea.
- The second one took place in Latin America in August, in Porto Rico, during the AIDIS (Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering) congress.
- The third forum took place in Marrakesh, Morocco, in September 2004, with the valuable assistance of the Moroccan National Office for Potable Water, ONEP, and the non-governmental organization pSEau, in parallel with the International Water Association (IWA) congress.

Focusing on the African forum, more than 80 people attended representing a large number of African



ards. This resulted in concrete proposals that were incorporated into a report prepared by Nigeria and South Africa.

The results and conclusions of the Latin American and African fora were presented at the 4th TC meeting in Rabat, Morocco, from 27-29 September 2004. It should be noted that this was the first time that an ISO meeting had taken place in Morocco, and about 70 delegates attended. Zimbabwe participated in the TC meeting for the first time thanks to the financial support of the ISO Development and Training Programmes (DEVT).

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The TC also supported the suggestion from the developing countries that the draft standards be tested in some cities in developing countries, in conjunction with professional associations and local authorities, before the draft international standard enquiry in July 2006.

Rabat was also the appropriate place for a presentation on the ISO Policy on twinning arrangements, in which Mrs. Sophie Clivio from ISO Central Secretariat explained the new rules on twinning between a developing and a developed country. She informed the committee that a twinning arrangement had been agreed between SNIMA (Service de Normalisation Industrielle Marocaine) and AFNOR (Association Française de Normalisation) for ISO/TC 224, and that SNIMA is therefore registered as a twinned P-member of the committee. ■

countries: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda.

Presentations and debates

The first part of the forum was devoted to several presentations: the chair and the working group convenors of ISO/TC 224 introduced the work and the draft standards in development, while the secretariat explained how to participate in ISO/TC 224 work. A presentation was also given on actual experience of implementing the standards in the city of Nantes in France. The World Health Organization and the World Bank, which are international organizations in liaison with ISO/TC 224, also gave their views on the standardization work.

The second part of the forum was dedicated to a debate among the participants with the aim of answering questions and getting comments from African countries on the draft stand-

During the TC meeting, a “Developing countries” workshop – led by Morocco and also involving Argentina, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and South Africa – resulted in some concrete recommendations for the TC based on the conclusions of the various water fora.

Worthy of note is that, from among the various proposals and amendments that will have to be considered by the working groups, the TC accepted the creation of an ad hoc group entitled “Developing countries” and for which Mr. Zouggari (Morocco) was nominated convenor. The main tasks of the group will be to:

- propose adaptation of the definitions and performance indicators to suit the situation in developing countries;
- study the development of a user’s guide for developing countries;
- list and precisely define the different kinds of water supply and wastewater services in developing countries and link them to the types of services described in the working group drafts.

About the author



Laurence Thomas, who holds an MSc in Innovation (materials option) joined AFNOR in December 1987 as a standards engineer. From 1990 to 2004 she worked in the

field of environmental analysis and more particularly that of water. During this time she was in charge of standardization in the field of water quality at French national, CEN and ISO levels, and, in particular, was the Secretary of ISO/TC 147/SC 5, *Water quality – Biological methods*. Since January 2004 Ms. Thomas has been Secretary of ISO/TC 224, while continuing to deal with all aspects of microbiological analysis of water, again at French national, CEN and ISO levels.