



ISO and the consumer



- ISO standards support the development and trade of goods and services which better meet consumers' expectations for safety and health, fitness for purpose, environmental protection and other qualities
- Consumer representatives participate in the development of ISO standards and help define product specifications that meet consumers' needs
- When the end product meets the consumer's requirements, this creates a win-win situation – both for consumer and manufacturer or service provider

Participation of consumer interests in standardization builds confidence in the goods and services developed according to specifications ... and ensures that they are adapted to the needs of the end-user.



Why ISO values consumers' input

ISO seeks to ensure that its standards are market-relevant and meet the needs of the end user, frequently a consumer, exposed to an increasingly global offer of goods and services.

Whether or not consumers are direct users, they are often concerned with the wider implications of the production and trade of goods and services, such as ethical manufacturing practices, environmental impact, implications of technological change and systems to provide information to consumers or to address their complaints.

When a product is some component or part of some industrial equipment, or a service, an ISO standard may define the necessary safety and performance characteristics. The end user in this case would be a manufacturer or service professional. However, in other cases, the end user belongs to the general public: the consumer*. Consumer goods and services impacted by ISO's standards range from bicycles, baby carriages, and bank cards to newer areas such as consumer product safety, network services billing, product recall, and cross-border trade of second-hand goods.

As a result, consumer issues are at the heart of ISO's strategic planning, its *Code of Ethics* and its current standards development work.

* ISO defines the consumer as an individual member of the general public, purchasing or using goods, property or services, for private purposes, *Source: ISO/IEC statement, Consumer participation in standardization work*

What matters to consumers?

Standards often define the characteristics of goods and services, and the way to measure or test them. Consumer representatives wish to influence these characteristics so that products and services provide higher levels of:

- Quality and reliability
- Protection of safety and health
- Compatibility between products
- Consistency in the delivery of services
- Choice of goods and services
- Transparency in product information
- Fair competition, hence lower prices for consumers
- Suitability of products for vulnerable populations (children, the elderly)
- Environmental protection.

How ISO involves consumers' views

ISO organizes and encourages the input of consumers' views on two levels:

- In standards development work, through the participation of its national members and Consumers International
- At the policy level through ISO member participation in its Committee on consumer policy (ISO/COPOLCO). The members of ISO/COPOLCO are national standards bodies (NSBs), or consumer organizations mandated by the NSBs. ISO/COPOLCO also solicits views from industry specialists and public authorities.

A major challenge is to increase consumer participation in standards and policy work at all levels, particularly from developing countries. ISO/COPOLCO organizes international workshops, publishes informative brochures and provides other training material and programmes for this purpose.

The ISO brochure, *Your voice matters* explains the reasons why consumers need to participate in standards-making and how they can become involved.

A distance-learning tool, *Consumers and standards: partnership for a better world*, provides a concise resource for further reference (see www.iso.org/sites/consumersstandards/index.htm).

ISO's partners on consumer issues

The International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) which produces standards for electrical consumer goods, also participates in ISO/COPOLCO to develop ISO/IEC Guides relating to the inclusion of consumer aspects in the development of standards and to formulate recommendations on new standardization work.

Two international organizations are liaison members of ISO/COPOLCO: Consumers International (CI) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). ISO/COPOLCO also cooperates with regional consumer organizations.

How standards benefit from consumer input

When consumer representatives participate in developing standards, they are able to offer valuable perspectives. They can provide data on safety aspects and ensure that these are properly addressed, give examples of how goods and services are actually used (or misused) in practice and give advice on communication issues.

ISO/COPOLCO organizes the participation of consumer representatives in ISO and IEC standards projects currently under development. Priority areas include:

- Issues related to safety and performance of household appliances
- Services (generic guidelines, tourism, financial services, water supply and wastewater disposal)
- Fire safety issues
- Second-hand goods
- The elderly and people with disabilities
- Environmental issues (environmental management, energy use, climate change)
- Water safety – drowning prevention
- Graphical symbols and public information systems
- Global marketplace issues (codes of conduct, complaints handling, dispute solution systems, privacy, e-commerce product recall and network services billing)
- Child related products and safety of toys
- Mechanical contraceptives
- Health informatics
- Societal security
- Food safety
- Social responsibility
- Nanotechnology
- Image safety
- Cosmetics (sun protection test methods)
- Contact lens care products.



Consumer-driven initiatives within ISO

ISO/COPOLCO holds an annual international workshop that focuses on a consumer-oriented theme, leading to recommendations which ISO takes on board in the form of new standards work. Examples are:

- Services – such as standardization in tourism
- Social responsibility – guidelines on ethical management practices
- “Customer service” standards: codes of conduct, complaints handling and external customer dispute resolution systems
- General guidance – policy statements on consumer participation and needs of the elderly and people with disabilities
- Guides for standards-writers (safety aspects, packaging, product information, instructions for use, graphical symbols, and provision of services)
- Consumer issues for e-commerce
- Network services billing
- Product recall
- Consumer product safety
- Cross-border trade of second-hand goods.

Looking towards the future: consumer and societal interests

With the advent of the Internet and other information technology breakthroughs, and globalization, access to information is becoming increasingly open. There also is a demand for more transparency and participation in the structures that determine today's economic and political landscape. Thanks in part to consumers' input, ISO's standardization programme extends beyond traditional product standards to encompass societal concerns such as the environment, social responsibility and standardization of services.



ISO values stakeholder input. By providing precious feedback and a “reality check” for such characteristics as safety, ecology, reliability, efficiency, compatibility, customer service, transparent information, and reasonable cost, consumers play a vital role in ensuring ISO's global relevance and market responsiveness.

Two URLs to remember :

ISO Online : www.iso.org

ISO Café : www.iso.org/isocafe

The magazine to read :



ISO Focus+ (launched in January 2010) provides a “one-stop shop” for information on the complete range of ISO’s standards: technical, management, good practice and conformity assessment, and for products, services, processes, systems, materials and professionals. Published in English and French.

www.iso.org/isofocus+



ISO Committee on consumer policy (ISO/COPOLCO)

Abundant information, including publications and useful references, is available in the **Consumers** section on ISO’s Website, www.iso.org.

Contacting ISO :

the ISO member in your country

www.iso.org/isomembers



ISO Central Secretariat

International Organization for Standardization
1, chemin de la Voie Creuse, Case postale 56
CH-1211 Genève 20, Switzerland

Tel. + 41 22 749 01 11

Fax + 41 22 733 34 30

E-mail central@iso.org

Web www.iso.org