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Consumers make their mark

New and proactive ways of looking at safety

highlights from the consumer workshop

by Jeanne Bank, Co-Chair, COPOLCO working group on priorities

Consumers of the 21st century view safety in a very different way than they did when ISO's Committee on consumer policy (COPOLCO) hosted its very first workshop in 1979. On that occasion, members of COPOLCO met to consider **product safety** and to make recommendations to ISO about consumer priorities in this area. While consumer product safety stills remains a key priority for consumers and COPOLCO, catastrophic events such as the Asian Tsunami, environmental emergencies, terrorism attacks and threats of terrorism have certainly brought broader issues of safety and security to the forefront of the public agenda. These evolving concerns have also brought the world closer together.

ISO/COPOLCO gathered 150 delegates from around the world in Toronto, Canada, from May 22-26th, 2005 for its plenary meeting and workshop. Hosted by the Standards Council of Canada, the event was an opportunity to discuss safety and security from the perspective of consumers and to address how International Standards and other guidelines can contribute to improving public safety and security. Forty countries were represented at the meeting, from every region of the globe, including 16 delegates from developing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Mitigating risks, managing emergencies

The theme for the workshop, held on 24 May 2005 was: "A safer world for consumers – how can standards help?" Pat Keindel, President, Standards, Canadian Standards Association (CSA) introduced the workshop and provided delegates with an overview of how CSA's standards work and consumer participation activities have improved safety and security. Dr. James Young, Special Advisor to the Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, gave the international delegates a fascinating



Mr. Arnold also called on COPOLCO to "help identify those areas of security standards which are important to consumers and to get involved in this area of International Standards work".

Greater collaboration is key

Mr. Hal Stratton, Chair of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, stressed the increasing importance and relevance of international voluntary standards in ensuring safe products. Globalization provides many benefits to consumers, but it also presents some significant challenges for regulators in protecting consumers from injuries involving unsafe products. While regulators may take different approaches, greater collaboration is key to addressing issues such as harmonization, counterfeit products, and product testing and certification. According to Mr. Stratton, harmonization of standards and global product certification regimes present some real opportunities to address product safety issues in a global marketplace.

"A modern and safe world is dependent on standards that must evolve with societal concerns."

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission has already entered into a number of memorandums of understanding with Europe, Canada and China and plans to become more involved in the work of COPOLCO and ISO in order to come up with proactive solutions to product safety issues.

Global impact

Throughout the workshop, the speakers touched on the range of emerging safety and security issues impacting consumers globally:

- Marilena Lazzarini, President, Consumers International, spoke about the



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first-hand account of Canada's experiences in dealing with the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the pandemic SARS, and a major power blackout. According to Dr. Young, "today's emergencies are more frequent, bigger, international in scope, and complex to manage". He said that his experience in dealing with these recent emergencies has shown how important standards are to not only help mitigate the risks, but to help with the management of emergencies. This is particularly true in global situations, which require common protocols and integrated approaches.

Security inventory

George Arnold, Chair of the ISO Technical Management Board Strategic Advisory Group on Security (SAG) provided the delegates with an overview of the extensive work completed by the SAG to inventory standards work related to security and to identify any gaps. He highlighted the recommendations from the SAG's Report, including the formation of a permanent ISO Group on Security and the need for horizontal guidelines for standards developers to ensure that security issues are addressed in relevant international standardization activities.



structure, health care, resources (air, water and energy supply), transportation, communication, and emergency services. There was a general support from this session for the recommendations from the SAG and the value of consumer input to help set work priorities. At the same time, participants concluded that consumer organizations need to take on a broader vision of safety and to look at these new areas of standards work from a “citizen” view.

Use and promotion of consumer guides

The need for ISO to take a more inclusive approach to promoting the concepts of “design for all” or “universal design” was one of the key conclusions from the breakout group that looked at the promotion of safety of vulnerable populations. While acknowledging that ISO and IEC already have excellent guidance materials, such as ISO/IEC Guide 50 on child safety, ISO/IEC Guide 51 on safety aspects, and ISO/IEC Guide 71 on aging and disability issues, participants questioned whether they were being effectively employed. This issue was also a common theme throughout all the meetings. As a result, COPOLCO has now established a special ad hoc group under the leadership of James McCabe, ANSI, to develop a strategy paper on the use and promotion of ISO/IEC consumer guides.



COPOLCO also had a training seminar on consumer representation in standardization.

current work taking place in CODEX on food safety and the essential need for consumer involvement in this area.

- Peter Clark, Executive Director, Standards Council of Canada, made a presentation about the role for product certification in improving consumer safety.
- Professor Ishiyama of Japan spoke about the work taking place in ISO/TC 98, *Bases for design of structures*, to improve building security for earthquakes and provided the audience with some very practical safety tips on how to survive a tsunami.
- Alice Sturgeon, Treasury Board of Canada, completed the morning by mapping out the range of work taking place on security within the information technology field. She highlighted work of specific relevance to consumers, such as biometrics and smart cards.

- How can we make sure that efforts are not duplicated, and that countries are working together ?
- How are the needs of our aging population and the disabled being considered in dealing with emergencies and security standards ?
- What tools work best to inform and engage the public ?
- What are the priorities for consumers and citizens ?

In the afternoon, three breakout sessions were organized to foster discussion on the following themes : protecting services ; promoting safety of vulnerable populations, and balancing public security needs and personal interests.

Protection of essential services

The breakout group on protection of essential services considered how ISO work can influence safety and security, including : protection of the built infra-

Articulating gaps in standards

Among the concerns that emerged from the workshop discussions are the gaps in current standards development and the implementation of standards – a consumer issue that COPOLCO is well positioned to help articulate. Other issues demanding further attention were reflected in questions raised by the audience, such as :

- How can the interests of developing countries be addressed in standards for security ?



Some 150 ISO delegates from around the world attended the COPOLCO workshop in Toronto.



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Security versus privacy

The very timely issue of balancing security with personal interests such as privacy and the protection of personal information was tackled by the final breakout group. This included discussion about the role and benefits of new technologies and the challenge of communicating the impacts or implications of these security advances to consumers. Participants agreed that more clarification is needed about the impact of these advances on personal interests such as privacy.

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There was also general support from the group for the concept of a “privacy impact assessment tool”, which would help to assess the impact of different security developments and products on personal privacy. Participants suggested that this “lens” could be part of the security guidelines to be

drafted for standards developers. They thought the tool might also provide a common benchmark or criteria that privacy advocates and independent data commissioners could use to evaluate new security products, services, policies and programmes.

How can standards help?

A modern and safe world is dependent on standards that must evolve with societal concerns. The COPOLCO meeting in Toronto positioned the consumer and public interest at the centre of the discussion on safety and security and identified a number of new and proactive ways of looking at safety in the global environment. In recent years, COPOLCO meetings have often initiated new work within ISO on emerging social policy issues such as social responsibility or aging and disability issues. The 2005 meeting did not focus on new issues, instead, it looked at the cross-cutting issues of safety and security from the perspective of the 21st century consumer who is not only interested in traditional consumer interests but in the broader issues affecting global citizens.

The resolutions adopted at the plenary meeting on 26 May 2005 provide concrete actions for COPOLCO in helping to identify real solutions that will benefit all stakeholders. COPOLCO will

be developing policy recommendations on new safety-related subjects such as: recalls, risk assessment for consumer product safety, a privacy impact assessment tool, training and participation of consumer representatives, and compliance management guidelines.

This broadly-based consumer perspective is timely and aligns with the *ISO Strategic Plan 2005-2010*. As COPOLCO enters its 27th year, it is poised to provide a valuable and strategic input to the ISO community. The leadership of the Chair, Caroline Warne combined with the valuable involvement of the organization Consumers International and the increasing participation from developing country members have been instrumental in increasing the relevance and impact of COPOLCO’s role. Canada was pleased to host the COPOLCO 2005 plenary and workshop and looks forward to an ongoing active involvement in this key ISO forum. ■

About the author



Jeanne Bank is responsible for the Consumer Program at the Canadian Standards Association and is active in standards-related consumer policy work at both the national and

international level. She is the Co-Chair of the ISO/COPOLCO working group on priorities and is a member of several working groups in COPOLCO. Jeanne is also the President of the International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO).