



**BUSINESS PLAN**  
**ISO/TC 51**  
**Pallets for unit load method of materials handling**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Pallets, as covered by the scope of this committee, are platforms or trays on which goods may be packed to form unit loads for handling by mechanical devices. Production and use is world-wide and there is considerable movement of the pallets with packaged goods.

No world-wide figures are available for the size of this market and even on a national scale figures are hard to obtain. Manufacturing capacity is spread fairly well across the world. Despite the absence of definitive figures it is estimated that the world-wide volume of sales is growing at a rate of around 2% per annum.

Standardization in the field of pallets will provide a positive economic impact throughout the packaging chain by improving the design of pallets operating within sophisticated packaging systems in relation to efficiency and safety performance allowing for clear unambiguous technical specifications leading to lower costs and contributing to the removal of possible technical obstacles to trade by the free exchange of palletized goods.

The market has already benefited from standards produced by this committee and it is hoped that the completion of the ISO 8611 suite of standards will provide a comprehensive set of performance requirements for all types of pallet. Manufacturers can (and do) use these as ready-made contractual elements when subcontracting work to other factories. When used in this way they also contribute towards a general raising of standards and aid the free passage of goods.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 ISO technical committees and business planning

The extension of formal business planning to ISO Technical Committees (ISO/TCs) is an important measure which forms part of a major review of business. The aim is to align the ISO work programme with expressed business environment needs and trends and to allow ISO/TCs to prioritize among different projects, to identify the benefits expected from the availability of International Standards, and to ensure adequate resources for projects throughout their development.

### 1.2 International standardization and the role of ISO

The foremost aim of international standardization is to facilitate the exchange of goods and services through the elimination of technical barriers to trade.

Three bodies are responsible for the planning, development and adoption of International Standards: [ISO](#) (International Organization for Standardization) is responsible for all sectors excluding Electrotechnical, which is the responsibility of [IEC](#) (International Electrotechnical Committee), and most of the Telecommunications Technologies, which are largely the responsibility of [ITU](#) (International Telecommunication Union).

ISO is a legal association, the members of which are the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) of some 140 countries (organizations representing social and economic interests at the international level), supported by a Central Secretariat based in Geneva, Switzerland.

The principal deliverable of ISO is the [International Standard](#).

An International Standard embodies the essential principles of global openness and transparency, consensus and technical coherence. These are safeguarded through its development in an ISO Technical Committee (ISO/TC), representative of all interested parties, supported by a public comment phase (the ISO Technical Enquiry). ISO and its [Technical Committees](#) are also able to offer the ISO Technical Specification (ISO/TS), the ISO Public Available Specification (ISO/PAS) and the ISO Technical Report (ISO/TR) as solutions to market needs. These ISO products represent lower levels of consensus and have therefore not the same status as an International Standard.

ISO offers also the International Workshop Agreement (IWA) as a deliverable which aims to bridge the gap between the activities of consortia and the formal process of standardization represented by ISO and its national members. An important distinction is that the IWA is developed by ISO workshops and fora, comprising only participants with direct interest, and so it is not accorded the status of an International Standard.

## 2 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT OF THE ISO/TC

### 2.1 Description of the Business Environment

The following political, economic, technical, regulatory, legal and social dynamics describe the business environment of the industry sector, products, materials, disciplines or practices related to the scope of this ISO/TC, and they may significantly influence how the relevant standards development processes are conducted and the content of the resulting standards:

[Packaging of consumer products has rapidly grown in all developed economies as a consequence of higher buying power and self-service distribution. Therefore packaging waste represents a growing share of household waste. This has become a concern for local and national authorities.](#)

Packaging plays a vital social and economic function in its delivery of an endless range of products which are subject to various legislative requirements related to the quality, safety and hygiene of packaged products as, for example:

- regulations concerning packaging in contact with foodstuffs;
- requirements for the transport of dangerous goods.

Whilst internationally measures dealing with the environmental aspects of packaging and packaging waste are at an early stage, within Europe these measures are impacted by the introduction of the packaging and packaging waste directive 94/62/EC, which is likely to have an influence outside the EC.

The delivery of packaged product as well as the safety of the user will depend on the performance of packaging. There is therefore a need for precise specifications as to the characteristics and performances of packaging and packaging systems for a given application. International standards on performance requirements and associated test methods give the packaging industry and the many industrial and distribution sectors concerned the tools and references needed, which will help set up clear adequate specifications, ensure and monitor needed quality levels and reduce costs

However, packaging alone will not ensure safe delivery, it requires several parts of an increasingly sophisticated distribution chain to mesh in terms of size, load capacity and storage capacity of which the pallet has been an integral part. Packaging is constantly changing over time to meet new requirements from fillers and consumers and a need to take advantage of opportunities offered by new raw materials and improved manufacturing technologies. This is particularly true with an increase in the use of plastics pallets. Standards should not be an obstacle to technical progress and to the development of new packaging types and systems.

Products covered by the scope of this committee are restricted to platforms or trays on which goods may be packed to form unit loads for handling by mechanical devices. The base material has traditionally been wood, but there is increasing use of other materials such as metal, composites or plastics. Production is world-wide with the technology involved fairly simple and relatively cheap to set up. Whilst improvement in manufacturing capability is constant, it is unlikely that basic techniques will change much over time. What is likely to change is the dependence on wood as a base material, though this will still be driven by cost.

As stated above, changing technology does not have a major impact on the development of the market. Similarly, changes to the functional design of pallets are not likely to change (it is reasonable to assume that in a few years time a pallet will still resemble a pallet as we now know it). Consequently the market is not under threat from innovation. It is also reasonable to assume that traditional pallet designs will continue to be used to support a distribution system based on the unit load. Meanwhile there has been a steady rise in the use of plastics, opening up new markets. There has also been an influx of low-cost pallets using low-grade materials from areas of the world where labour is cheap and little investment is required. Regulations are in place in some countries governing the materials that can be used in pallet production and the standards produced by this committee address that issue.

## **2.2 Quantitative Indicators of the Business Environment**

The following list of quantitative indicators describes the business environment in order to provide adequate information to support actions of the ISO/TC:

Pallets covered by the scope of this committee are everyday items of use in a great part of the world. They are manufactured in many countries and are used to transport trade internationally.

Most pallets produced are for transport, but they are also used for handling products within storage systems or warehousing, where they never see the light of day.

No world-wide figures are available for the size of this market and even on a national scale figures are hard to obtain. However most societies use pallets so the size and importance of the market can clearly be seen. Manufacturing capacity is also spread fairly well across the world. Despite the absence of definitive figures it is estimated that the world-wide volume of sales is growing at a rate of around 2% per annum. An indication of market value may be estimated from recent figures for Western Europe, where turnover of the packaging industry represents around 2% of GDP. In addition, recent figures indicated that 18% of the total timber production in the United States was used in pallet production, a not insignificant proportion.

### **3 BENEFITS EXPECTED FROM THE WORK OF THE ISO/TC**

Standardisation in the field of pallets will provide a positive economic impact throughout the packaging chain by achieving the following key objectives:

- improvement of the design of pallets operating within sophisticated packaging systems in relation to efficiency and safety performance
- harmonization and simplification of test methods allowing for clear unambiguous technical specifications leading to lower costs
- contribution to the removal of possible technical obstacles to trade by the free exchange of palletized goods, where it is important to note that inability to handle international pallets is not only a barrier to trade on packaging as such but also a barrier to the packaged product.

The market has already benefited from standards produced by this committee and it is hoped that the completion of the ISO 8611 suite of standards will provide a comprehensive set of performance requirements for all types of pallet. Manufacturers can (and do) use these as ready-made contractual elements when subcontracting work to other factories. When used in this way they also contribute towards a general raising of standards and aid the free passage of goods. The standardisation of pallet sizes for intercontinental trade by ISO 6780 could be of great assistance to developing nations when adopting national pallet sizes.

### **4 REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ISO/TC**

#### **4.1 *Countries/ISO members bodies that are P and O members of the ISO committee***

#### ***4.2 Analysis of the participation***

Participation is split between Pacific Rim countries, the United States and Europe. Active participation at working group level is reasonably balanced, though since European countries constitute about 50% of the TC membership there is still a bias towards the European point of view in voting matters.

### **5 OBJECTIVES OF THE ISO/TC AND STRATEGIES FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENT**

#### ***5.1 Defined objectives of the ISO/TC***

Development of standards within the scope of the committee, adjusting the work programme as needed to meet the needs of the marketplace and changing technology. It is currently expected that no new work will be proposed after the completion of the current programme and the committee will merely monitor its existing standards and undertake any amendments which may prove necessary.

## **5.2 Identified strategies to achieve the ISO/TC's defined objectives**

The committee has four working groups, two of which are currently active. They meet as and when necessary and conduct work by correspondence where feasible. The TC meets every two years to review and co-ordinate the work

## **6 FACTORS AFFECTING COMPLETION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISO/TC WORK PROGRAMME**

The most important factors in causing delays in the delivery of standards are the lack of consensus caused by differing national regulations or attitudes towards the subject of study and the absence of proven test methods. More worrying, however, is the lack of resources to conduct collaborative trials which may occasionally prove necessary to validate test methods.

## **7 STRUCTURE, CURRENT PROJECTS AND PUBLICATIONS OF THE ISO/TC**

This section gives an overview of the ISO/TC's structure, scopes of the ISO/TCs and any existing subcommittees and information on existing and planned standardization projects, publication of the ISO/TC and its subcommittees.

### **7.1 Structure of the ISO committee**

### **7.2 Current projects of the ISO technical committee and its subcommittees**

### **7.3 Publications of the ISO technical committee and its subcommittees**

#### **Reference information**

**[Glossary of terms and abbreviations used in ISO/TC Business Plans](#)**

**[General information on the principles of ISO's technical work](#)**