

The Environment and Standards: close together

32nd World Standards Day

14 October 2001

Each year on 14 October, the members of ISO, the IEC and ITU celebrate World Standards Day, which is a means of paying tribute to the collaborative efforts of the thousands of experts worldwide who develop the voluntary technical agreements that are published as international standards.

"Perhaps the greatest and certainly one of the most public challenges of the new century is our environment, how to protect it, how to manage it better." So say the leaders of the three principal organizations responsible for developing international technical standards in their joint World Standards Day 2001 message. The message is signed by ISO President Mario Cortopassi, IEC President Mathias Fünfschilling and ITU Secretary-General Yoshio Utsumi.

High-profile events, such as the Rio Earth summit and the Kyoto Convention, have shown the difficulty faced by many governments in coming to grips with global environmental issues.

However, these summits have created a new consciousness among business, industry and consumers of many positive steps that they can themselves take with or without a strict regulatory framework. International standards, based on international consensus, have for many years been a primary tool in helping them to resolve a number of environmental issues.

International standards provide globally applicable solutions, are cost-effective and allow all countries to take advantage of the knowledge and experience gained in the more advanced economies. One major advantage that international standards offer in dealing with environmental issues is that they are for voluntary adoption by anyone - individuals, businesses or governments - meaning that they can be used and acted upon before legal requirements are introduced.

"ISO, the IEC and ITU also have an important responsibility as well as an active role in helping developing and newly industrialized countries to become environmentally conscious while contributing to make their own future economically and environmentally stable," say the three organizations' leaders. "Whether it is in management, product, systems, process, measurement or testing standards - or indeed by facilitating sustainable development through the spread of standardized telecommunications - each organization has its part to play and each works with a host of others to have the widest possible consensus as well as the most globally beneficial effect."

Hundreds of standards already exist dealing with specific questions such as the sampling, testing and analysis of air, water and soil. Thousands more covering a multitude of physical products, increasingly in the electrical, electronic and telecommunication spheres, already contain information and recommendations on environmental aspects like materials, industrial processes, recycling and waste disposal. Many of these will also have an important role in current efforts to help consumers with standardized, clear and easily understood eco-labelling. At the strategic level, international standards on environmental management offer a structure, a methodology and practical tools to help organizations of all types to manage the impact of their activities on the environment.

To conclude, ISO, the IEC and ITU say that "the informed, realistic and responsible way in which ISO, the IEC and ITU are addressing environmental issues that affect us all will have a growing impact on society's response to meeting its own expectations. The environment and international standards are perhaps more than just close together. For the foreseeable future, they are inextricably linked."

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{PRIVATE}The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) group government authorities, representatives of industry, research institutes, universities and consumers, and other experts, to reach a consensus on worldwide standards in almost all realms of human endeavour, from aircraft and space vehicles to basic units of measurement and test methods. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is an agency of the United Nations which has among its aims the extension of the benefits of new telecommunication technologies to all the world's inhabitants and facilitation of the worldwide standardization of telecommunications.