



*Information Retrieval on  
Standards, Technical  
Regulations and Conformity  
Assessment Procedures*

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This bulletin has been prepared, without formal editing, as a service to exporters and industries in developing countries and economies in transition by the Export Quality Management Service, Business Advisory Services Section, Division of Trade Support Services, International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, 54-56 rue de Montbrillant, CH 1202 Geneva, Switzerland. Tel.+41.22.730.03.96; Fax+41.22.730.05.76; E-mail: [gujadhur@intracen.org](mailto:gujadhur@intracen.org); Internet: <http://www.intracen.org> ; Postal address: ITC, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

# **“Information Retrieval on Standards, Technical Regulations and Conformity Assessment Procedures”**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

This bulletin provides information on how you - as an exporter - can obtain information on current standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures for industrial and agricultural products in your export markets. However, it does not deal with information on sanitary and phytosanitary measures. This bulletin also indicates how you can keep abreast of developments of interest to you in the areas of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures.

The definitions given below are reproduced from the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

*Technical Regulation:* A document, which lays down product characteristics or their related process and production methods, including administrative provisions, with which compliance is mandatory. It may also cover terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method.

*Standard:* A document approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products and their related processes or production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory. It may also cover terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labeling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method. When a standard is declared mandatory it becomes a technical regulation.

*Conformity Assessment:* Any procedure used, directly or indirectly, to determine that relevant requirements in technical regulations or standards are fulfilled.

When you export a product covered by technical regulations you need to demonstrate through conformity assessment that your product complies with these or it will be denied entry. It is not mandatory for you as an exporter to comply with the standards in the country you want to export to, but it is desirable.

## **2 INFORMATION ON TECHNICAL REGULATIONS**

### **2.1 Information on current technical regulations**

The WTO Agreement on TBT requires each WTO Member country to identify a national enquiry point for technical regulations. Each national enquiry point is responsible for ensuring that any enquiry on national technical regulations is adequately answered.

A number of options are available for obtaining the required information and these are given below:

- If your country is a WTO Member it has already set up or will set up a national enquiry point. You can request your national enquiry point to forward your request for information to its counterpart in the country to which you wish to export. You can also address your query direct to the enquiry point abroad.
- If your country is not a WTO Member, you can still contact the national enquiry point in your target market. Even though national enquiry points are not obliged to respond to enquiries coming from non-WTO Members, they will rarely refuse to do so.
- It becomes a little bit more difficult to obtain information if your target market does not have a national enquiry point. You will have to deal with other official sources (such as embassies, departments of trade or commerce) either in your country or abroad.
- Should all the above fail, then the only way open to you is for you yourself to conduct a search in your target market. It can be a frustrating task to find your way through the bureaucracies; obtaining the help of a local partner will ease your way through the maze.

The list of national enquiry points on TBT can be obtained from the WTO homepage: [http://docsonline.wto.org/gen\\_home.asp](http://docsonline.wto.org/gen_home.asp): select *Search* and type *G/TBT/ENQ* in the document symbol search field. All WTO Members are required to establish and identify at least one enquiry point to respond to requests for information on national technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures.

## **2.2 Information on future technical regulations**

Each WTO Member country is responsible for informing the WTO Secretariat about the impending implementation of any new or revised technical regulation in the country. The WTO Secretariat then makes this information available to all WTO Members. In this way the WTO/TBT Agreement tries to ensure that the whole system of technical regulations is open and transparent.

The purpose of notifications is to allow interested parties (usually trading partners whose trade will be affected by the regulation) to comment on the draft regulation and for changes to be made. Members have 60 days from the date of publication of the notification to respond.

Notifications are sent to the WTO Secretariat in Geneva, which circulates them to all member countries and also posts them on the WTO website. Notifications go to the diplomatic missions in Geneva, after which they are sent to relevant organisations, including the national enquiry point. Notifications are available on the WTO web site and downloadable immediately.

Individual enterprises or industry associations should contact their national enquiry point and request them to forward notifications of interest to them. They should send their comments back to the enquiry point within the required time, to allow their governments to defend their interests by responding to the notifications at WTO. Your country can request the WTO Secretariat to inform them of notifications on topics of particular interest to them.

Some examples of well-developed response systems to notifications are given below.

In Canada the enquiry point is a department of the Standards Council of Canada, named Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade. Incoming notifications received by the enquiry point are entered into an on-line database and coded by subject area, using the International Classification for Standards. Canadian companies interested in receiving notification information select their areas of interest, using the ICS system to ensure that they are only sent notifications relevant to them. The enquiry point sends the notifications electronically to interested parties. Recipients can obtain more detailed documents related to the notifications if desired, and also provide comments on the proposals (<http://www.scc.ca>).

In Brazil the enquiry point is a department of the National Institute of Metrology Standardization and Industrial Quality (INMETRO). INMETRO has been active in developing new support information tools for Brazilian exporters, helping them overcome possible restrictions to trade. One of these tools is called “Alerta Exportador”. It enables exporters to receive daily, by e-mail and without any associated costs, information on the issuing of new WTO notifications on technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures according to a pre-defined profile. (<http://www.inmetro.gov.br/barreirastecnicas>).

### **3 INFORMATION ON STANDARDS**

#### **3.1 Information on current standards**

When determining if standards are applicable to your product, bear in mind that, in some cases, standards might exist for the product characteristics as well as for the test methods to determine whether your product meets the standard. Some of the methods you can use to get information on current standards are described below.

##### **National Standards Bodies (NSB)**

The first step is to contact the NSB in your country, which will generally have a standards information centre. NSBs keep a collection of their own standards, and they will frequently have collections of national, regional and international standards. At standards information centres, you will usually be able to consult catalogues of standards from various standards bodies to see which of them apply to your product in your chosen

export market. An NSB will be able to sell you its own standards and it will frequently be licensed to sell you standards from other standardising bodies. If it does not have the standard you require, you can ask it to order the standard for you from the relevant NSB, but you will have to pay for it. Copies of standards are generally not distributed free. (There are some exceptions. Codex Alimentarius standards, for example, can be downloaded for free from [www.codexalimentarius.net](http://www.codexalimentarius.net)).

### **The Internet**

If you do not have easy physical access to your NSB or if you wish to obtain foreign or international standards directly from the relevant standards body, you can use the Internet to search for and obtain standards. More and more NSBs are using this medium to sell standards and disseminate information.

The World Standards Services Network (WSSN) is a network of web sites of standards organisations around the world. Through the web sites of its members, WSSN provides information on international, regional and national standardization and related activities and services (<http://www.wssn.net>).

Many web sites of national, regional and international standards bodies linked to the WSSN allow you to search for, buy, and download standards on-line. Even if they do not have the complete standards on-line, you should be able to consult on-line catalogues, and then contact your own NSB, or, failing that, an NSB in another country, or the original standards-development organisation to buy a hard copy of the standard you want.

### **Standards information from commercial distributors**

Most international and national standards bodies distribute the catalogues of their standards online free of charge and on paper and/or CD-ROM on a cost recovery basis. There are a few companies/organizations which distribute, on a commercial basis, catalogues on CD-ROM containing information on the standards of a number of standards organizations, such as ISO (International Organization for Standardization), IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission), BSI (British Standards Institution), DIN (Deutsches Institut für Normung), etc. There are also distributors (e.g. IHS - Information Handling Services) which commercialise CD-ROMs containing sets of standards, including the full standards collections of the standards bodies mentioned above. Such collections and the relevant update services are usually quite expensive.

## **3.2 Information on future standards**

All central government standardising bodies in member countries have to accept and comply with the “Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards” contained in Annex 3 of the TBT Agreement. Member countries also need to take reasonable measures to ensure that their sub-national and regional standardising bodies, which may be governmental or non-governmental, also accept this Code. The Code requires all standardising bodies that have accepted its terms to publish their work programmes at least once every six months. Work programmes

contain the standardising body's name and address; give details of new standards that are under preparation and those that were adopted in the preceding period. A standard is considered to be "under preparation" from the moment a decision is taken to develop a standard until that standard has been adopted. Many standardising bodies' work programmes are available at no cost by contacting the relevant body.

To get information on future standards, contact your country's NSB, which will provide you with information on any standards it is developing that affect you. Your NSB may also be able to inform you of developments in standards in your export markets or in international standards by consulting the work programmes of standards bodies that have accepted that Code.

## **4 INFORMATION ON CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

### **4.1 Conformity assessment in the mandatory sector**

For products in the regulated sector, you should contact the national enquiry point that your country has set up under the WTO Agreement on TBT. Your national enquiry point should be able to get the information you need on technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures from its counterpart in your target market.

You can also contact the enquiry point in your target market yourself. Again, it should be able to give you information on conformity assessment procedures as well as on conformity assessment bodies, which are acceptable to the regulator for your product.

If the country you wish to export to is not a WTO Member, you can try to obtain information as you would for technical regulations (see clause 2).

In some developing countries, national standards bodies operate product certification schemes, which are mandatory for some products. A list of these bodies can be accessed from the ISO website ([www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)) as well as from ITC's "World directory of organizations dealing with standards, technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, eco-labelling, quality management and accreditation" ([www.intracen.org](http://www.intracen.org)).

Information about future conformity assessment procedures can be obtained in the same way as for technical regulations (see 2.2).

### **4.2 CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

#### **4.2.1 Product certification**

Product certification involves the issue of a certificate or mark to demonstrate that a specific product meets a defined set of requirements for that product, usually specified in a standard. This mark is normally found on the product or its packaging.

To get information about product certification you should contact the national accreditation body, which can provide information about accredited product certification bodies. Information about national accreditation bodies can be obtained from the website of the International Accreditation Forum (<http://www.iaf.org>) or from ITC's "World directory of organizations dealing with standards, technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, eco-labelling, quality management and accreditation" ([www.intracen.org](http://www.intracen.org)).

#### **4.2.2 System certification**

System certification certifies the ability of a company or an organization consistently to supply products that conform to customer and/or applicable regulatory requirements. It does not relate to a specific product or service but to a company's management of the production process.

The criteria used for certifying quality management systems are based on international standards such as ISO 9001:2000 "Quality management systems - Requirements"; criteria for certifying environmental management system are based on ISO 14001:1996 "Environmental management systems - Specification with guidance to use". Information about ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 certification bodies can be obtained from the "ISO Directory of ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 accreditation and certification bodies". The directory lists the accreditation body (if there is one in the country) and the certification bodies operating in each country. In addition, it provides information on quality system registration bodies operating multinationally. You can also obtain information from the accreditation body in the country you want to export to.

#### **4.3 Information from the Internet**

One important conformity assessment service in Europe is the TICQA database, which was developed by EOTC (European Organization for Conformity Assessment) and EC (European Commission) with the support of EFTA (European Free Trade Association). This on-line database contains information about 3200 conformity assessment bodies dealing with calibration, certification, inspection, and testing in Europe (<http://www.ticqa.eotc.be>). Information about national and international conformity assessment procedures can be found on the website of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (<http://ts.nist.gov/ts/htdocs/210/gsig/assessment.htm>) or on the website of the American National Standard Institute (<http://www.ansi.org>).

## ANNEX

List of selected websites where information about standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures can be obtained:

- [http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tbt\\_e/tbt\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tbt_e/tbt_e.htm)
- <http://www.iso.org>
- <http://www.iec.ch>
- <http://www.itu.int>
- <http://www.ili.co.uk>
- <http://www.iaf.nu>
- <http://www.ansi.org>
- <http://ts.nist.gov>
- <http://www.intracen.org>
- <http://www.conformityassessment.org>
- <http://www.wssn.net>
- <http://www.codexalimentarius.net>
- <http://www.ticqa.eotc.be>
- <http://www.oiml.org>
- <http://www.scc.ca>
- <http://www.inmetro.gov.br/barreirastecnicas>
- <http://www.asq.org>
- <http://www.afnor.fr>
- <http://www.din.de>
- <http://www.cenelec.org>
- <http://www.cenorm.be>
- <http://www.bsi-global.com>
- <http://www.ihs.com>
- <http://www.perinorm.com>

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ITC supports developing and transition economies, and particularly their business sectors, in their efforts to realize their full potential for developing exports and improving import operations.

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- Product and market development
- Development of trade support services
- Trade information
- Human resource development
- International purchasing and supply management
- Needs assessment, programme design for trade promotion



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