

ASNT POSITION PAPER ON INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

The following Position Paper on International Standards Development
has been approved by the Board of Directors of the Society

The American Society for Nondestructive Testing (ASNT) recognizes the impact of standards on global commerce and the potential for standards to facilitate international trade. These activities must be conducted in a manner resulting in a common benefit to the whole world. ASNT strongly supports standards development activities that do not compromise a nation's commitment to the promulgation of technical excellence, and which ensure the health and safety of the public. Further, the true test of an international standard is its fair and open access to the standards development process, and its record of success in meeting international market and safety needs.

The conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, and the subsequent formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), provide the framework for further rationalization of international markets, with attendant benefits to all WTO members and their citizens. ASNT subscribes to the underlying beneficial principle stated in the preamble of the agreement establishing the WTO, which calls on members to conduct their trade relations in a manner that will raise standards of living, ensure full employment and a large, steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, and expand the production of, and trade in, goods and services, while allowing for the optimal use of the world's resources in accordance with the objective of sustainable development, seeking both to protect and preserve the environment and to enhance the means for doing so in a manner consistent with their respective needs and concerns at different levels of development.

ASNT's long history of serving industry and humankind follows closely the WTO philosophy. This is clear from ASNT's mission statement: "ASNT exists to create a safer world by advancing scientific, engineering, and technical knowledge in the field of nondestructive testing.TM"

ASNT supports the concepts of free and equitable access to international markets. For technical standards to facilitate international trade, several conditions must be satisfied. The scope and content of the standard must adequately address a defined need while incorporating appropriate current scientific and technical experience gained by industry that will ensure a level of safety and performance expected. For any standards development organization, procedures should provide for technical consensus of affected parties. For this reason, ASNT has recently committed to continue participation on ISO TC 135 and now actively participate on all TC 135 subcommittees. Through this participation ASNT will ensure the US interests will be informed, provided opportunities for review and comment on emerging and proposed revisions to current ISO documents. As an active member, ASNT will also have an opportunity to influence the international consensus process. When standards fill both trade normalization and safety/performance roles, all of the active participants and their national programs will benefit. NDT provides many industries with final verification of a product's integrity and must be applied with the highest level of confidence. Where safety is paramount, there is no room for

error. Only standards developed with full global industry access and participation will be able to address the issues effectively and provide solutions.

Most non-US national and regional standards development organizations are closed to non-members. Consequently, US participation in their process is inhibited if not denied outright. Another benefit of ASNT's increased participation is to influence the development and/or revision to these non-US national and regional standards. But until we are invited to participate, mutual standards recognition between the US and other bodies is possible only through ex post facto negotiations at a political level. In the case of non-US national standards, technical adjudication provisions are not directly provided. Technical interpretation of standards provisions is consequently cumbersome and subject to lengthy processes.

Procedurally, ASNT provides for technical consensus in its standards development committees. ASNT policy provides for a balance of relevant technical interests on all responsible standards activities. Similarly, ASNT does not discriminate on membership to its committees based on citizenship. ASNT committees are open to qualified individuals regardless of nationality. Finally, ASNT provides procedural due process: fair and open access to its standards development process.

Clearly, there are international standards other than ISO standards. This is especially important when applying language such as "international standards" and "international body." ISO standards acquire the title of "international standards" solely by virtue of the composition of ISO. This is, however, no guarantee of the technical quality or commercial merit of the resulting standards. For example, the standard ISO 9712, for the qualification and certification of NDT personnel, does establish minimum training and experience requirements. The document does not specify a means to measure an individual's capabilities against a performance standard. Although written and practical examinations are required in ISO 9712, the content, level of difficulty, and process of assessment are not addressed. This is another area that ASNT will work to influence the inclusions of criteria addressing difficulty and means to measure individual capabilities against performance measures.

Companies involved in international trade and concerned about issues of performance and safety will continue to impose additional individual requirements in an attempt to ensure an expected level of NDT reliability.

As the international standards development process continues to mature, the marketplace will determine the success of each standard. In some instances, existing international standards will remain the dominant standard for international trade. In others, a performance-based approach for harmonization will be preferred and subsequently developed, approved and implemented. For instance, it may not be possible to harmonize different existing NDT personnel qualification standards with each other, but it may be possible to develop a single performance-based standard that states requirements in terms of required results with criteria for verifying compliance but without stating the methods for achieving required results. Those evolutions of the qualification and certification process is one of ASNT's goal as it has committed to fully engage with the ISO process.

While these events unfold, greater international harmonization with ASNT performance-based practices and standards will first occur on a case-by-case basis between other nations and regions. Although harmonization with ISO standards is an ASNT goal, public health and safety will always be the first priority of ASNT.

Until the ISO standards development process evolves sufficiently, other national or regional standards will acquire the title of international standard through industry acceptance and recognition in the global marketplace. Maintaining standards of proven excellence is a significant contributor to the well-being of the entire international community, especially in regard to safety.

ASNT's practices and standards are already de facto international standards by virtue of their widespread use around the world. ASNT's mission and purpose, to serve industry and society, obligates the organization to pursue innovations in achieving NDT personnel performance excellence. ASNT will continue to develop and introduce these initiatives in the US and other regions upon request, based on industry needs, independently of ISO activities. ASNT is, however, committed to participation within the ISO framework, and will continue to contribute to the extent possible toward the effective and efficient harmonization of international NDT standards.