International Standards

What is a Foreign Standard?

When exporters market their products overseas, the products they want to export need to meet foreign product standards. Standards provide consistency for characteristics, guidelines, and specifications for products, services, and processes. The use of standards helps to make industry more efficient and effective, and helps to break down barriers to international trade. The majority of standards developing organizations depend on revenue from the sale of standards to support their programs and services, but a growing number offer access to their standards for viewing or download available for no cost.

Many times a company will seek certification to a standard due to a contractual or regulatory requirement, or a certification may be necessary in order to meet customer preferences. Each country or industry will have its own product certification process to navigate.

International standards organizations, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are examples of standards development bodies that develop guidelines and specifications for products, services, and processes. A country's national standards body or committee be- comes a member of an international standards organization: for example, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is the U.S. member body to the ISO.

When seeking certification, a company will work with a certification body (which is separate from a standards organization) that will provide assurance that the specific standards requirements have been met. A "mark" will then be issued for the standards certification that was sought. Many marks are country, region, or industry specific, and the most common product marks are listed to the right.

Common Foreign Standards

- ISO 9000 - Quality Management
- ISO 14000 - Environmental Management
- ISO 22000 - Food Safety Management
- ISO 31000 - Risk management
- ISO 50001 - Energy Management

Common Product Marks

- Underwriters Laboratories® (UL)
- Canadian Standards Association (CSA) International
- China Compulsory Certification (CCC)
- European Union: Conformité Européenne (CE)
- Mexico: Normas Oficiales Mexicanas (NOM)

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Who develops standards in the U.S.?

There is no single government organization in the United States that oversees the voluntary development of standards. The National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act directs the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to collaborate with federal agencies, state and local governments, and other public and private agencies to achieve greater reliance on voluntary standards. Specifically, NIST works with ANSI, the U.S. Member Body to the ISO that coordinates U.S. private sector standards development activities. This collaboration performs a vital coordinating role by ensuring that U.S. interests are adequately represented in international standards arenas.

Because the U.S. standards system is decentralized, a comprehensive list of all bodies that develop standards in the United States does not exist. However, several resources that offer a substantive snapshot of many industries are listed in the last two pages of this Fast Fact.

Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries. Notify U.S. is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets.

Seeking Certification

While each country or industry will have its own process to navigate, the general procedure to comply with product certification involves the following steps:

1. Determine if your product requires certification by any of the bodies regulating trade in your target market. Check the list of products subject to certification. Is your product exempt?

2. Conduct a self-assessment. Purchase the standards and evaluate the specifications needed for your products, components, or parts. Do your products meet the minimum requirements?

3. Apply for testing and certification with an accredited organization. Submit your application along with a sample and all necessary documentation. You may need an agent for this step to navigate the in- country process, including any appeals or disputes, and to avoid paying additional fees.

4. Purchase or print the certification marks to apply to your product once it has been approved and publicly "listed" by the testing laboratory.

Supervision After Certification

Although similar models of products may not need additional testing, significant product modifications may require re-certification. Some manufacturers choose to conduct in-house quality and standards testing to maintain product certification along with customer satisfaction. These companies need to submit to unannounced inspections and audits to satisfy the testing requirements.

Packaging and Labeling Standards

Packaging

Packaging standards vary by country and product. For sensitive items, such as food, medicine, cosmetics, or hazardous goods, there are stricter standards for their packaging and handling. Often, the seller may choose to have higher standards than required to avoid lawsuits or competitive issues. Packaging standards were developed based on the physical, mechanical, and chemical properties of the various paper, wood, and plastics used commercially.

Labeling

Labels are in the form of written text or numerical statements, and are often required but are not recognized as a "mark." Mandatory labels usually indicate the contents, pricing, expiration date, and warnings associated with the products' use. In many countries, labels must be in the host language; manufacturers minimize costs by printing packages with multiple languages so the product can be sold in several markets.

Packaging and Recycling Laws

Packaging and recycling laws in other countries have been growing in importance for U.S exporters and can affect their ability to sell abroad. U.S. exporters need to ensure that their packaging materials are compliant with their importer's domestic recycling regulations.

Regulations for Wood Packaging Materials

The National Wooden Pallet and Container Association (NWPCA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have a Memorandum of Understanding giving the NWPCA the authority to administer the Export Wood Packaging Material (WPM) Fumigation Program. The program conforms with the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures Publication No. 15 (ISPM15) and adheres to the Export WPM Fumigation Program Policy and Enforcement Regulations. The program is designed to allow wood packaging material to be used in export, thus facilitating international trade while eliminating concerns for the presence of pests. Countries that are now implementing ISPM 15 include:

- **North America -** United States, Bermuda, Canada and Mexico
- **Latin America -** Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela
- **Europe -** European Union, Norway, Turkey, Ukraine
- **Asia Pacific -** Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam
- **Africa -** Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa
- **Middle East -** Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Syria

These countries will only accept properly treated and marked WPM. To make your WPM suitable for inter- national shipment, it must be marked with the HT or MB treatment mark. To apply the mark, a facility must be certified by a recognized inspection agency.

Agriculture-Specific Requirements and Certifications

Agricultural exports require a number of unique documents and certifications from both the U.S. and destination country. Foreign Agricultural Service Regulations are compiled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service keeps track of export requirements by country and also by the type of meat and food product.

Eligible products exported to Countries with Approved Export Verification (EV) Programs must be produced under an approved USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) EV Program and be identified as meeting the requirements of the applicable EV Program. Under an EV program, only certain product and/or product codes are allowed
for export.

The European Union

The European Union (EU) is the world's largest trading block. The EU's single market represents a multitude of opportunities for U.S. exporters but also poses a complex set of challenges. To gain access to the EU, U.S. companies must comply with European regulations, which address health, safety, environmental, and other areas of concern. Some of the key regulations include:

- **CE Marking:** CE marking certifies that a product has met EU health, safety, and environmental requirements, which ensure consumer safety. Manufacturers in the EU and abroad must meet CE marking requirements where applicable in order to market and sell their products in Europe. More.

- **REACH:** REACH is a major reform of the European Union's chemicals policy, and affects all global supply chains that produce and use chemicals. REACH requires the registration, evaluation, authorization and restrictions of chemicals entering the EU.

- **Safe Harbor:** The European Commission's Directive on Data Protection went into effect in October of 1998, and would prohibit the transfer of personal data to non-European Union countries that do not meet the European "adequacy" standard for privacy protection. While the U.S. and the EU share the goal of enhancing privacy protection for their citizens, the United States takes a different approach to privacy from that taken by the EU. In order to bridge these differences in privacy protection standards, the U.S., EU, and Switzerland have developed the "Safe Harbor" framework. As of July of 2016 for the EU, and January of 2017 for Switzerland, the Safe Harbor framework was replaced by the updated Privacy Shield framework as the new legal mechanism to comply with EU requirements when transferring personal data to the U.S..

- **WEEE/RoHS:** Companies selling a broad range of electrical goods in the EU must conform to both the WEEE (the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive) and the RoHS (Restriction of Use of Certain Hazardous Substances Directive). The European Union's WEEE and RoHS Directives are implemented in EU countries by national WEEE and RoHS
regulatory bodies.

  WEEE and RoHS regulations vary considerably from country to country. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that U.S. companies that export goods with large electrical components gather further information on WEEE and RoHS for the countries that they intend to export to.

(Source: http://export.gov/eu/index.asp)

NIST List of Standards Search Engines

The NIST Global Standards Information website provides a list of website links to search-able standards databases, along with helpful tips on searching for standards. Searching these databases is free and all offer the option of purchasing the standard. Before you begin your search, be aware that most standards must be purchased in electronic form or hard copy from the standards developer sponsoring the standard or an authorized standards re-seller.

- NSSN: ANSI's comprehensive standards search engine with more than 300,000 records
- IHS: The IHS Standards Store has over 800,000 standards, specifications, and codes
- TechStreet: Online database of over 400,000 industry codes and standards aggregated from 350 of the world's leading Standards Developing Organizations
- SAI Global Standards Infobase: Over 1 million world-wide engineering standards and specifications; registration is free, and is required to search the database
- Document Center Inc.: Access to over 750,000 documents, sells standards and provides monitoring, auditing, and updating services
- Codex Alimentarius: Operates within the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization to establish international food standards

Military Standards

Military standards are important for government contracts and procurement. The following search engines provide government and military standards:

- ASSIST Quick Search: Access to full-text Defense and Federal specifications and standards available in the official DoD repository
- DTIC Online: The largest central resource for DoD and government-funded scientific, technical, engineering, and business related information and is an excellent complement or back-up to ASSIST tools

Non-U.S. National Standards

It is important to know the national standards and regulations that must be addressed to gain entry to a new market. Within each country, the designated Inquiry Point to the WTO/TBT Agreement is prepared to assist you in identifying the pertinent standards and regulations that apply to the product or service you offer.

- British Standards Institute
- Standards Council of Canada
- Standardization Administration of China
- Association Française de Normalisation (France)
- Deutsches Institut für Normung (Germany)
- Japanese Industrial Standards Committee
- Korean Agency for Technology and Standards
- Israel Standards Institution

Virginia Economic Development Partnership - International Trade offers a number of export-related services to Virginia businesses, including trade missions and market research by our Global Network of in-country consultants. These services are available to all Virginia exporters.

For more information, please visit our website, ExportVirginia.org.

Additional Resources

Testing and Certification:

ASTM International

Bureau Veritas

NSF International

Rhein Tech Laboratories, Herndon, VA

SGS Group—Electrical and Electronics Testing

Technischer Überwachungs-Verein (TÜV)

Technology International Group, Richmond, VA

U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA-Recognized Testing Laboratories

National Technical Systems - Testing Services

Standards:

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) IECEE CB Scheme

Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE)

IEEE Standards Association

Standards.gov

Standards and Standard Setting

Compliance FAQ

World Guide to Standards Resources

Other:

GS1—Universal Product Code

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