

## U.S. Department of Commerce Standards Developing Organizations Roundtable (10/21/2003)

Nearly 70 participants attended the October 21, 2003 Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) Roundtable at NIST, co-chaired by Dr. Arden Bement, NIST Director and Dr. Mark Hurwitz, ANSI President and CEO. The topic was "How Can the Department of Commerce Work More Effectively with the Standards Development Community to Advance U.S. Trade Interests?" Presentations were made by the Acoustical Society of America (ASA), the Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute (ARI), ASME International, the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), ASTM International, the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), the International Code Council (ICC), the InterNational Committee for Information Technology Standards (INCITS), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP). An hour of open discussion followed the presentations.

Key questions and themes that came up during the roundtable included -

- The U.S. National Standards Strategy, developed by ANSI in partnership with NIST in 2000, should continue to be driven by the private sector, which is impacted by standards-related trade barriers including those related to conformity assessment and, as such, impacts the U.S. economy. The Department of Commerce (DOC) respects the roles played by ANSI and the U.S. standards developer community, and has no intention of getting into the "standards business" or mandating the use of any particular standards.
- Smaller standards development organizations tend to require more money and human resources per capita to support standards development than do larger standards development organizations. These smaller organizations cannot indefinitely subsidize standards development, especially when the threat exists that copyrights on standards may be revoked. Larger organizations must also address this issue.
- There is a growing need to support participation by interested parties in standards development. Additional avenues of financial support should be considered, including: 1.) engage academia more fully, 2.) direct support by the government of SDO's that develop standards that are directly involved with inherently governmental responsibilities and functions, e.g. national defense, the environment, public safety and public health, and 3. the Department of Commerce acting as a liaison to other Government agencies or Department to obtain funds from their budgets for standards activities that support a specific Government mission, e.g. defense or transportation.
- Because the government benefits directly and significantly from standards development work, Congress should specifically allocate money to support this work. In addition, federal agencies should budget funds for the travel and other participation costs of government representatives in standards-setting activities.
- Should the government fund development of public safety standards? Should the government fund the participation of private sector technical experts in standards development? How would this work and who would be chosen for subsidies? Who would administer the funds? NIST? Would this be, as some participants predicted, a "sinkhole?"

· Alternatively, should the government spend money on the underpinnings of the current system, and the future versions of a standards strategy? Most speakers endorsed the business model adopted by most standards developers, which is to support their standards development activities through the sale of standards. They suggested that the government (and in particular the Department of Commerce) should continue to support the system, and avoid any temptation to suggest alternative funding models. Several speakers suggested that if there was to be government funding, it should help subsidize the cost of sending experts to meetings outside the U.S. and to support the participation costs of government and consumer representatives.

· The voting system in ISO is unfair. Why does the U.S. get one vote when it has the biggest GDP in the world? Meanwhile, every country in Europe receives one vote? Voting should be normalized to GDP, or at least reflect very large differences among the players in this venue.

· Europe is trying to use standards as an economic tool to help pave the way for European products, particularly with regard to developing countries. This battle is being played out in many areas of the world, but when the U.S. has the opportunity to explain our system and its advantages, we compete very effectively with the Europeans. The Department of Commerce, and NIST, should continue to work in partnership with ANSI and standards developers to promote the U.S. standards system, and the standards of U.S.-based developers.

· Beyond Europe, there are many trade-related blocks and activities that directly impact U.S. standards setting organizations.

· International agreements should allow references to non-ISO and IEC standards.

· DOC should provide "evidentiary" (i.e., formal) U.S. government support for the U.S. standards developing community as a means of refuting European dominance. Many in the SDO community want a statement on the issue from the government, clarifying that many international standards come from standards developers in the U.S. using an open and transparent process to develop globally relevant standards, and that ISO/IEC/ITU are not the only purveyors or developers of international standards.

· DOC should help SDOs protect their copyrights to their standards and support the right of standards developers to exploit those rights and sell their standards to underwrite their costs.

· SDOs need to think about the timely maintenance of standards and increasing involvement in the process. ICT (information and communication technology) standards change quickly. Technical expertise will be needed to identify and cancel those that are obsolete. This takes yet more volunteer time from SDOs and technical experts.

· Most groups were supportive of the ANSI process for developing standards and encouraged DOC and NIST to continue to work with ANSI.

· DOC should have a louder voice in international standards foras and offer more opportunities for outreach activities and cooperative efforts with foreign governments, such as the NIST

Standards in Trade Workshops and DOC Special American Business Internship Training (SABIT) Standards Program, organized by NIST.

- DOC should work to better understand the complex interplay between patents, private commercial/trade secret information, and public standards. This would involve better understanding of international organizations such as WIPO, WTO, WHO, ISO, OECD, and many others. This understanding needs to be sectoral - it is not enough to develop a broad overview.