CONSENSUS STANDARDS: EXPERT SOLUTIONS TO MEET GLOBAL NEEDS

THE ISSUE

Voluntary consensus standards developed by private organizations are essential for a sound global economy and to facilitate global commerce. Standards foster building technology innovation by providing a transparent baseline and needed metrics for assessing how that technology can impact building design and performance. They are necessary for comparing technologies in the expanding global marketplace. U.S. Federal policy recognizes the value of voluntary consensus standards by requiring their use in regulations when consistent with agency policy and appropriate for agency purposes.[1]

Voluntary consensus standards are developed through the participation of any and all interested and affected stakeholders including manufacturers, users, advocacy organizations and representatives of government and academia. Standards accreditors such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) follow several principles such as including consensus, openness, balance, transparency and due process, and ensure that designated standards development organizations follow these principles and processes.

Copyright protection of voluntary consensus standards is critical to the continuation of the development and maintenance of standards. Without copyright protection for standards, resource-limited government agencies would have to undertake the difficult and expensive task of replicating the system of standards development organizations, or the standards-development process would be put into the hands of regulated parties with uncertain outcomes.

ASHRAE's ROLE

ASHRAE develops and publishes robust standards; many of which are adopted into building codes. ASHRAE standards establish recommended practice in the areas of indoor air quality, energy conservation and management, building water systems, high-performance buildings and others. ASHRAE's standard development process is rigorous, and it is one of only six standards-developing organizations in the U.S. that can self-certify that its standards have followed ANSI's procedures. ASHRAE also serves on U.S. Technical Advisory Groups (TAGS) for ISO Committees and in the role of international secretariat for ISO Technical Committees to help ensure that ASHRAE views are represented. These standards are supported by technical committees that develop publications and educational materials to assist in the application of ASHRAE standards. ASHRAE standards are developed by volunteers from around the globe under strict ethical and non-commercialism guidelines.

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[1] The National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-113) (NTTAA) and OMB Circular A-119

ASHRAE Government Affairs Office 1255 23rd Street NW, Suite 825, Washington, DC 20037
Tel: 202.833.1830 | Govaffairs@ashrae.org

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ASHRAE's VIEW

Use of voluntary consensus standards at all levels of government are a benefit to society. For this reason:

- Government entities should continue to support voluntary consensus standards in laws and regulations, which will protect public health and safety, improve commerce and save taxpayers money.

- Agencies should work with standards developers and industry to identify situations where societal interests could be addressed through the use of voluntary consensus standards and work together for common solutions.

- Governments should continue to foster and support the unique character and strengths of the public-private partnership in standards development as they pursue trade and other international agreements, regulatory harmonization and legislative and regulatory approaches.

- Governments should support policies, both domestically and internationally, which ensure the continued ownership and control of the copyrights and trademarks of standards developers.

- Government agencies should increase participation in the development of voluntary consensus standards, by encouraging government experts to participate, through release time and expenses incurred.

- Governments should update legislation and regulations to reference the latest versions of standards since they reflect the latest technical advances.

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