



## ISO in brief

International Standards for  
a sustainable world



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- ISO is the world's leading developer of International Standards.
  - ISO standards specify the requirements for state-of-the-art products, services, processes, materials and systems, and for good conformity assessment, managerial and organizational practice.
  - ISO standards are designed to be implemented worldwide.



*ISO standards make a positive contribution to the world we live in. They ensure vital features such as quality, ecology, safety, economy, reliability, compatibility, interoperability, efficiency and effectiveness. They facilitate trade, spread knowledge, and share technological advances and good management practices.*

### **The ISO standardization system**

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is a global network that identifies what International Standards are required by business, government and society, develops them in partnership with the sectors that will put them to use, adopts them by transparent procedures based on national input and delivers them to be implemented worldwide.

*ISO standards avoid having to reinvent the wheel. They distil the latest in expert knowledge and make it available to all. In this way, they propagate new advances and transfer technology, making them an invaluable source of knowledge.*

ISO standards distil an international consensus from the broadest possible base of stakeholder groups. Expert input comes from those closest to the needs for the standards and also to the results of implementing them. In this way, although voluntary, ISO standards are widely respected and accepted

by public and private sectors internationally.

ISO – a non-governmental organization – is a federation of the national standards bodies of 149\* countries, one per country, from all regions of the world, including developed, developing and transitional economies.

Each ISO member is the principal standards organization in its country. The members propose the new standards, participate in their development and provide support in collaboration with ISO Central Secretariat for the 3000 technical groups that actually develop the standards.

\* On 1 March 2005

ISO members appoint national delegations to standards committees. In all, there are some 50 000 experts contributing annually to the work of the Organization.

When their work is published as an ISO International Standard, it may be adopted as a national standard by the ISO members and translated.

### **The ISO system's output**

ISO has a current portfolio of 15 036\* standards that provide practical solutions and achieve benefits for almost every sector of business, industry and technology. They make up a complete offering for all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, environmental and social.

ISO's work programme ranges from standards for traditional activities, such as agriculture and construction, through mechanical engineering, manufacturing and distribution, to transport, medical devices, the latest in information and communication technology developments, and to standards for services.

**ISO standards teach the fisherman.**  
*"Giving fish" is one way. By implementing ISO standards and participating in their development, developing countries "learn how to fish for themselves". ISO standards transfer know-how, avoid wasting resources, safeguard public health and safety, and provide criteria for evaluating imports and for producing exports to compete on markets worldwide.*



**ISO standards level the playing field.** They make transparent the requirements that products must meet on world markets, as well as the conformity assessment mechanisms for checking that those products measure up to standards. As a result, suppliers from developed and developing countries alike can compete on an equal basis on markets everywhere.

The ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 families of management system standards have spearheaded a widening of ISO's scope to include managerial and organizational practice. (ISO does not carry out certification to these or any other of its standards, nor does it control the certification business sector.)

Complementing the above is a "toolbox" of ISO standards and guides for conformity assessment – covering all aspects from supplier's declaration of conformity to third-party certification and accreditation – which is becoming a vital component of business transactions, global trade and regulatory requirements.

### **ISO's partners**

ISO collaborates with its partners in international standardization, the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission) and the ITU-T (International Telecommunication Union), particularly in the field of information and communication technology. They have established the World Standards Cooperation (WSC) as the focus for their combined strategic activity.

ISO has a strategic partnership with the World Trade Organization (WTO) aiming to promote a free and fair global trading system. Signatories to the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) commit themselves to promoting and using international standards of the type developed by ISO.

ISO cooperates closely with most of the specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations that are involved in technical harmonization and assistance to developing countries.

ISO also maintains close working relations with regional standards organizations, many of whose members also belong to ISO. In addition, several hundred specialized organizations representing trade or regulatory sectors participate in developing ISO standards.

### **ISO's path forward**

New growth areas for ISO standards in the coming years include:

- **the environment** – with standards for meeting new requirements such as greenhouse gas verification (climate change mitigation) and for other aspects of sustainable development;
- **the service sectors** – with standards already being developed for personal financial services, market opinion, social research and tourism;
- **security** – among aspects already addressed are maritime port security, freight transport and countering illegal trafficking of radioactive materials;
- **good managerial and organizational practice** – such as the guidelines ISO is developing on social responsibility.

In addition, ISO is well placed to provide voluntary standards for formerly regulated areas such as energy, water supply or transportation.

**ISO standards make the cake bigger.** When new technologies or business sectors emerge, internationally agreed ISO standards on basic features, such as terminology, compatibility and interoperability, help to disseminate them and increase the size of the market for the derived products and services.

## Two URLs to remember :

ISO Online : [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)

ISO Café : [www.iso.org/isocafe](http://www.iso.org/isocafe)

## Two magazines to read :



**ISO Focus**, a panoramic view of standards and related issues: what is being done, why it is being done, what will be done and how it affects you. Published in English

[www.iso.org/isofocus](http://www.iso.org/isofocus)



### **ISO Management Systems,**

Worldwide coverage of ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 developments. *Plus* new standards initiatives for important business and societal issues such as social responsibility, sustainability, occupational health and safety and conformity assessment. *Plus* sector developments and national initiatives. Published in English, French and Spanish.



[www.iso.org/ims](http://www.iso.org/ims)

## Contacting ISO :

the ISO member in your country

[www.iso.org/isomembers](http://www.iso.org/isomembers)

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