

**SPECIAL MEETING ON THE STRENGTHENING
OF NATIONAL NOTIFICATION AUTHORITIES**

Communication from Mexico

1. Annex B of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and the recently approved Decision G/SPS/7/Rev.2 set out a series of transparency obligations which are imposed on Members and the fulfilment of which serves usefully to prevent unnecessary barriers to trade. Nevertheless, the developing countries face difficulties at national level in implementing the procedures required to ensure effective compliance with the commitments undertaken. This document describes Mexico's improvements to its national enquiry point and seeks to identify the difficulties encountered in that process.

A. STRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL ENQUIRY POINT

2. In Mexico, the national enquiry point is operated by the Promotion Department (Information Centre) of the General Directorate of Standards (DGN) at the Ministry of the Economy, which advises, brings up to date, trains and informs manufacturers, importers, service suppliers, consumers, research centres, chambers, associations, bodies, departments, students and the public at large on activities relating to the national as well as the international standardization and conformity assessment system.

3. The Information Centre is staffed by three officials; it is equipped with computer, fax and modem facilities and has permanent access to the Internet.

4. At international level, the DGN Information Centre serves as the contact point concerning technical regulations and sanitary and phytosanitary measures for the Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and countries with whom Mexico has concluded free-trade agreements.

5. As part of this activity, more than four years ago the Government issued an electronic version of the Mexican Standards Catalogue, which contains the texts of, and additional information on, all technical regulations and standards and sanitary and phytosanitary measures in force in the country. The Catalogue is available to users at: www.economia.gob.mx/P=85.

6. The Information Centre's corresponding task at domestic level is to provide information on technical regulations, standards, conformity assessment procedures and sanitary and phytosanitary measures notified to Mexico pursuant to requirements in the SPS Agreement, the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) and the relevant chapters of the various free-trade agreements entered into by Mexico.

B. PROCEDURE FOR NOTIFYING REGULATIONS AND SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

7. Staff working for the Information Centre scan the Official Journal of the Federation on a daily basis for the full texts of draft technical regulations and sanitary and phytosanitary measures

(including those issued for emergency reasons) and conformity assessment procedures. In close cooperation with the DGN's Directorate of Standards and the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the WTO, they then determine whether, and to which of the Committees established under the SPS or the TBT Agreement, the document in question should be notified.

8. The document notifying the draft is prepared by the Information Centre, revised by the Directorate of Standards and sent to the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the WTO, which makes any comments required or forwards the document to the WTO Central Registry of Notifications. The whole procedure is performed electronically and normally takes two days to complete.

C. PROCEDURE FOR CIRCULATING NOTIFICATIONS RECEIVED (NOTIFICANORM-DGN)

9. So far, Mexico has used a computer system for the circulation of notifications; the information is updated twice a month on the basis of the electronic archives provided by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the WTO, and is summarized in a bulletin sent to interested users (e.g. chambers, associations). Starting in November 2003, however, Mexico will put into operation a new system for circulating notifications, called "NOTIFICANORM-DGN", which will be available free of charge.

10. The "NOTIFICANORM-DGN" system will make it easier to consult notifications received. It will be continuously updated and will automatically identify parties interested in any given notification. Users will be able to obtain information on:

- Developments in the quality of products and services worldwide;
- behaviour of the markets in relation to standardization proposed by any given sector in a WTO Member country;
- draft regulations, measures and conformity assessment procedures submitted by WTO Members for comment, in accordance with the provisions of the SPS and TBT Agreements;
- new products, processes and production methods, labelling, packaging, etc. in other countries with which users could establish trade relations and increase their competitiveness;
- draft standards which competitors and/or possible trade partners are seeking to establish in their countries in the medium term. This will enable users to take part in the development of technical regulations.

11. The system will operate in the following sequence:

- (a) Users access the system via the Internet and enter their particulars (including e-mail address), specifying the products, countries, languages and types of notification (TBT or SPS) of general interest to them;
- (b) once they have registered, the system identifies their preferences, meaning that every time a notification entered meets the specified parameters it is automatically e-mailed to the interested user;
- (c) users wishing to obtain and comment on the full text of a regulation may apply to the Information Centre, which will request the notifying Member to provide the document; and

- (d) once users have formulated their comments, within the timeframe specified in the notification, these should be sent as an attachment to the Information Centre for dispatch to the national enquiry point of the country concerned.

12. So far, the countries referred to under paragraphs (c) and (d) appear satisfied, despite certain problems mainly regarding the speed of response to requests for information and the translations of the relevant texts.
