

PROGRESS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (EMS) STANDARDIZATION

Statement by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)
at the Regular Session of the Committee on Trade and Environment of 8 October 2002

Paragraph 32(iii)

1. I noted with interest that the Swiss delegation, as well as the Indonesian and the European Union, has made reference to the definition of "eco-labelling" prepared by Sub-committee 3 Environmental labelling of the ISO Technical Committee ISO/TC 207 Environmental management, as reported in WT/CTE/W/114 that I presented at the June 1999 meeting of the CTE. The due process for developing consensus on eco-labelling ISO standards was, at the time, well advanced but not finalized and it may be appropriate to offer an update to the CTE.

2. May I recall that within ISO, Technical Committee 207 is responsible for the development of the ISO 14000 family of international standards on environmental management. The standards are developed by consensus among the national delegations of 66 countries, plus 15 observer members and 35 international organizations in liaison. This consensus process complies with the requirements regarding international standards that were specified by the TBT Committee during the second triennial review of the TBT Agreement (as had been recalled by the Canadian delegation). The ISO 14000 family of international standards is a set of generic tools for developing, implementing, maintaining and evaluating environmental policies and objectives. The family contains standards for environmental management systems, environmental auditing, environmental performance evaluation, environmental labelling and life cycle assessment. This informative booklet was distributed during the business day of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

3. The basic philosophy is that the environmental management system (EMS) of an organization is of central importance and that the other standards are intended to support specific elements of the organization's environmental policy, and its implementation by the market players in the private sectors, on a voluntary basis. As mentioned by the Swiss delegation, the ISO 14020 series of standards addresses a range of different approaches to environmental labels and declarations, including self-declared environmental claims, eco-labels (seals of approval) and quantified environmental information about products and services.

4. The agreed definition of Type I environmental labelling programmes, often referred to as Eco-labelling programmes, is contained in ISO 14024:1999, which provides the guiding principles and procedures for third-party environmental labelling certification programmes. This international standard also establishes the certification procedures for awarding the label. The definition – agreed by consensus in the Committee – of Type I environmental labelling is: a voluntary multiple-criteria-based third party programme that awards a licence which authorizes the use of environmental labels on products indicating overall environmental preferability of a product within a particular product category based on life cycle considerations. Under these programmes, manufacturers are licensed to use a mark, owned by an independent body, on their products, to demonstrate that these products are environmentally preferable.

5. The definition of self-declared environmental claims or Type II environmental labelling is contained in ISO 14021:1999, which provides guidance on the terminology symbols and testing and verification of the environmental aspects of its products and services. The definition of self-declared environmental claim (type II environmental labelling) is an environmental claim that is made, without independent third-party certification, by manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or anyone else likely to benefit from such a claim. This standard is broadly used around the world and many countries have adopted it as a national standard.

6. The third approach requesting quantified environmental information, i.e. the type III environmental labelling, did not receive consensus and is not, at this point in time, an ISO standard. It has, however, been defined and its requirements specified in a technical report ISO/TR 14025:2000. It identifies and describes elements and issues for consideration when making declarations of quantified product information based on Life Cycle Inventory data. This Type III environmental declaration (from ISO/TR 14025:2000) is defined as: quantified environmental data for a product with pre-set categories of parameters based on the ISO 14040 series of standards, but not excluding additional environmental information provided within a type III environmental declaration programme. Such a complex definition reflects a lack of consensus among the national delegations participating in the work. It is, however, used as a basis for the on-going work.

7. The general principles that serve as a basis for the development of the series of ISO guides and standards on environmental claims and declarations are contained in ISO 14020:2000.

8. ISO standards are published in English, French and Russian. The broad acceptance of this series of ISO standards led ISO/TC 207 to establish a Task Force to assist the Spanish speaking countries to produce definitive Spanish versions of the ISO 14000 series of documents. The Chairman is from Mexico and the Secretary from Spain. Translation into Arab is being prepared by the regional standardization organization AIDMO (Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization).

9. ISO is, of course, at the disposal of CTE for providing more specific information in writing and/or at future meetings.
