

## Why do consumers need to be involved in standards development?

The lack of strict national, regional or even international standards regulation can be disastrous. In India, it has been reported that as many as 20 out of 21 brands of thermometers have recorded inaccurate temperature. The absence of strict standards governing thermometer manufacturers has caused anguish to many families. This is because even a little rise or fall of temperature recorded can make a difference where tension-and-relief or even where life-and-death is concerned (2000).



Mobile phones in all its glory, can easily cause many health threats like cancer, alzheimer's disease, headaches and immunity system destruction to name a few, if mobile phone manufacturers are not regulated properly. In Sweden, mobile phones have been proven to increase the risk of brain tumor by almost two and a half times. It was also found that users making four or more calls a day were 3.6 times more likely to suffer from headaches. In crucial situation such as this, strict standards regulations concerning mobile phone radiation level are definitely much needed.

A standard does not just appear overnight. Instead, the procedure to develop a standard is tedious and may be somewhat dull to a normal layman. However, the awareness of how a standard come about need to be introduced to the consumers so that they can appreciate and see the value of standards. Not only that, consumers involvement when drafting of standards is very important and crucial. Why is that so?

Standards are essential elements in daily life. Imagine an environment of not being able to withdraw



money from an automated teller machine (ATM) because your ATM card is too big or having just bought batteries that do not fit any of your appliances. Standards

guarantee compatibility and interoperability and at the same time, serve as a backbone for your daily life. They are developed based on the daily life needs of consumers in various fields. Due to this, consumers should participate actively in the drafting and developing of standards because at the end of the day, only you (consumers) understand your own needs best.

# Standards & You

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## What are standards?

The word standards to many, remain just a word. Consumers, especially, may not be aware of the role that standards play in their daily purchase of goods and services. The task of buying batteries for instance, is so simple and easy simply because the specifications for batteries have been standardized.



Hence, standards are actually documented agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines, or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purposes.

In normal layman term, we can say that standards guarantee the safety of products found in the market and ensure that the products are not harmful when consumed by consumers.

## What is ISO?

Many may ask, “who is responsible to make international standards?”. The answer is simply, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO is a worldwide federation of national standard committees from about 130 countries. Established in 1947, its mission is non other than to promote the development of standardization in the world to facilitate the international exchange of goods. It aims to develop cooperation in intellectual, scientific, technological and economic areas as well.

ISO started with the goal of standardizing sizes for light bulbs, screws, batteries and a few other consumer products. ISO then moved on to define the format for credit cards, phone cards and smart cards. Adherence to the standard would mean that all cards possess feature like optimal thickness of 0.76 mm, which in turn, allow the cards to be used internationally.



Indeed, ISO standards are results from long discussions among technical committees comprising experts from industrial, technical and business sectors, representatives of government agencies, environmentalist, consumer associations and so on. To put things into clearer perspective, there are as many as about 30000 experts participating in meetings each year. This may sound unbelievable but it is a fact. All in all, member bodies can participate and exercise full voting rights on the technical committees of ISO.

## Why is international standardization needed?

With the present globalization paradigm, consumers are faced with many choices of goods and services. Consider a simple chore of buying imported electrical appliances. How can the consumers be sure that the appliances that they bought are safe and fit to be used locally? In such scenarios, international standards play a very important role to instill such assurance and confidence in consumers. With the existence of harmonized standards for similar technologies in different countries or regions, a so-called “technical barrier to trade” can be broken down. Export-minded industries can be sure that their products and goods will be suitable for use in other countries.

## National Standardization

Having given the “big picture” where international standardization is concerned, let us now just “pick a tree from the whole forest” and observe the status of standards in Malaysia.



The Department of Standards Malaysia (DSM) is the National Standards Body of Malaysia that is responsible for the development and promotion of Malaysian Standards. Similar to the ISO, Malaysian Standards are also developed through consensus by committees. These standards, where appropriate, are



total adoption of international standards. Two very famous standards of such are the ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 series. The ISO 9000 series puts priority in quality management.

For instance, stringent adherence to consistent high standard for packing of quality tea has

earned Boh Plantations Sdn. Bhd. an ISO 9000 standard as well as the title of world-class brand. The ISO 14000 series on the other hand, encourages the companies to be more environment-friendly. It ensures “environment-caring” products from companies around the world.

Sirim Berhad has been appointed by DSM to undertake the development of Malaysian Standards at the technical level. SIRIM has long been associated with quality competitiveness and industrial efficiency. Issuance of ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 series certificates to qualified companies, is one of SIRIM’s responsibility. SIRIM also provides two types of certificates to manufacturers, namely the “MS” and “S” marks. Certified companies can then use the SIRIM Certification Mark on their products.

If a SIRIM-certified product is suspected to be the cause of an accident, SIRIM will conduct an investigation, as part of its obligations. Electrical items like multisockets and multiplug adapters, especially, can easily result in electrocutions and fire, if made from inferior quality materials. Hence, in purchasing such goods, do act wisely and buy only those with the SIRIM mark!

