



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Recommendation No. 20

CODES FOR UNITS OF MEASURE USED IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Submitted by the Information Content Management Group (ICG)

For Approval

Recommendation No. 20

CODES FOR UNITS OF MEASURE USED IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

I. PREAMBLE

The United Nations through UN/CEFACT (United Nations Centre for the Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business) supports activities dedicated to improving the ability of business, trade and administrative organisations, from developed, developing and transitional economies, to exchange products and relevant services effectively. Its principal focus is to facilitate international transactions, through the simplification and harmonization of procedures and information flows.¹

The UN/CEFACT work-program emphasises the need for developing recommendations, which simplify and harmonize the current practices and procedures used in international transactions. Within this context, the role of the UN/CEFACT Information Content Management Group (ICG) is to secure the quality, relevance and availability of code sets and code structures to support the objectives of UN/CEFACT, including managing the maintenance of UN/ECE Recommendations related to codes.

The accompanying code list annexes (I, II and III) are intended to supersede and replace the code list annexes released with the second edition of Recommendation 20 (ECE/TRADE/WP.4/R.888/Rev.4) adopted by the Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures, in September 1995.

Recommendation 20 is intended to provide for:

- standardization leading to ease of communication;
- greater clarity and ease of use leading to harmonization via a comparative approach;
- addressing the practical user needs;
- ease of maintenance of the code entries.

To that purpose, a single list of code elements for units of measure for use worldwide in administration, commerce, transport, science and technology is provided.

II. RECOMMENDATION

UN/CEFACT,
Taking note, that the units of measure specified herein are provided to the user for the representation of physical quantities currently employed in international or regional trade. And taking note that this collection of units neither claims to address quantities or units of measure of a non-physical nature nor does it include historic units of measure not generally encountered in present day usage.

Recommends that participants in international trade when there is a need for coded representations of units of measure use the codes for such units presented in the lists annexed to this present Recommendation.

III. INTRODUCTION

1. In international trade there is a need for the greatest possible clarity in the use of units of measure not only for the fulfilment of commercial contracts but also for the application of laws and regulations governing international trade procedures.

2. In 1875 the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures BIPM (International Bureau of Weights and Measures) was established at Sèvres (France). The Bureau was provided for in the Convention du mètre signed that year at the first General Conference on Weights and Measures. The BIPM has a bilingual (English and French) Web site at <http://www.bipm.fr>.

3. The Système International d'Unités (International System of Units), with the abbreviation SI (see BIPM Web site above), was adopted by the eleventh General Conference on Weights and Measures in 1960.

4. These and other international efforts to harmonize units of measure and to ensure comparable results through common rules of application of standardized measures have aimed at contributing, inter alia, to a better understanding between trading partners, to improved conditions for Customs clearance and to ensuring comparability of international trade and transport statistics.

IV. BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT EDITION

5. This edition of Recommendation 20 is an extensive revision. The following clauses explain the background to the current edition and detail the enhancements that have applied between the previous edition and this edition of Recommendation 20.

¹ From the mission statement of UN/CEFACT

6. The UN/CEFACT Codes Working Group (CDWG) undertook to revise Recommendation 20 and to take account of requests from users for additional code values. As part of this process, the CDWG also undertook to review those codes contained in Recommendation 20 that were notated with a use identification of "Z" (codes included for information purposes with questionable usage). This action was the result of a maintenance process specified in clause 29 of Recommendation 20, namely:

The units of measure where the use is identified by a "Z" shall remain in the list for a period of not more than three years, at which time they will be deleted, unless a written justification and definition of the unit has been provided to the UN/ECE secretariat. (1995)

7. A consultative process with the user community was conducted during which open requests were made for user submissions to retain particular codes designated with "Z". Based on the submissions received a number of these units were retained in both Annex II and Annex III with the corresponding unit definition. However, there were a considerable number of units designated with "Z" for which no code definition has been received. As a consequence, these units have been "marked as deleted" in this edition of Recommendation 20 in accordance with clause 29.

8. A number of requests made proposals to enhance the contents, format and/or presentation of Recommendation 20. Clauses 5 through 12 detail the enhancements that have been applied with this edition.

9. Annex I (Units of Measure listed by quantity) has been designated as a normative Annex. As a result, it is now restricted to unit entries that are classified as SI and SI equivalent units. Applicable conversion factors have been added to those unit entries for which the conversion factor was missing, except for a limited number of specialist units. Annexes II (Units of Measure listed by name) and III (Units of Measure listed by common code) are designated as informative Annexes and contain all units of measure in Recommendation 20.

10. In addition to the name of the unit, allowance has been made for the inclusion of a description of the unit. The plain text description of the named unit of measure is limited to 350 characters in length. Unit descriptions are intended to be progressively introduced for existing entries and where possible should be from recognized sources. All new unit entries having no conversion factor to SI units, require a description of the unit. The description is optional for units provided with a conversion factor.

11. A status indicator has been introduced to indicate certain maintenance activities with respect to individual units (added, changed name, changed characteristic, marked as deleted, deprecated). It should be noted that code entries marked as deleted will be retained indefinitely in the code lists, however when appropriate, may be subsequently reinstated via the maintenance process.

12. The presentation of the three Annexes has been

aligned, and as a consequence, the essentially historical references contained in "Existing Codes" have been removed from Annex III, but have been retained in the supporting database maintained by the UN Secretariat.

13. With the consistent presentation of the Annexes, the need to retain the "Cross Reference" column came into question. The use of the "Common Code" provides a means to cross-reference the corresponding unit entry in the other two Annexes. As a consequence, the "Cross Reference" column has been removed from all Annexes, but has been retained in the supporting database maintained by the UN Secretariat.

14. With the introduction of the status indicator, the existing "Use Id." value of "X" (Deprecated) has been assigned a value of "D" and incorporated into the status indicator column. The "Use Id" column has been removed.

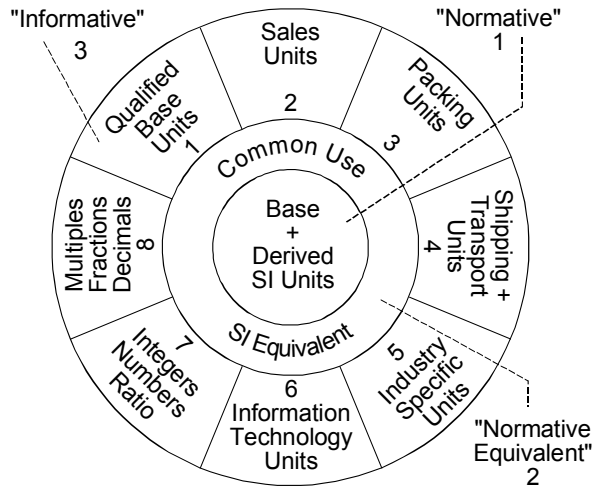
15. Historically the code elements for units of packaging were specified in Recommendation 20. The source of these codes is UN/ECE Recommendation No. 21 (Codes for types of cargo, packages and packaging materials) and as such, the code elements are maintained independently of Recommendation 20. To avoid duplicate maintenance and to better facilitate the use of the latest code elements for units of packaging, the existing code entries in Recommendation 20 for units of packaging have been marked as deleted. Users should reference UN/ECE Recommendation 21 for the applicable code entries to be used as units of measure. A set of guidelines on the use of the code entries in Recommendation 21 as Recommendation 20 units of measure, is provided at the foot of Annex II and Annex III.

16. The notion of "units of count" has been introduced for level 3 codes and the existing 3.1 to 3.9 categories retained. However, the sub-categories, "A" (for international use), "B" (for regional use with international potential), and "C" (regional or sectorial use only) have been dropped because of the difficulties in ascertaining and maintaining accuracy with this level of classification. Units of count are generally signified by "A unit of count defining the number of ..." in the unit's description.

V. SCOPE

17. This Recommendation establishes a single list of code elements to represent units of measure for length, mass (weight), volume and other quantities (including units of count) as shown in figure 1 and covering administration, commerce, transport, science, technology, industry etc.

**Figure 1
Units of Measure
Schema Components**



VI. FIELD OF APPLICATION

18. The code elements provided for in this recommendation are intended for use in manual and/or automated systems for the exchange of information between participants in international trade and of other economic, scientific and technological activities.

19. This Recommendation does not affect the use of code elements, other than those presented in the Annexes, which have been laid down in international conventions or agreements, binding on participants in international trade.

VII. TERMINOLOGY

20. For the purpose of this Recommendation the following definitions apply:

Unit of measure: - Particular quantity, defined and adopted by convention, with which other quantities of the same kind are compared in order to express their magnitudes relative to that quantity.

VIII. REFERENCES

Metre Convention, Paris 1875

<http://www.bipm.fr/en/convention/>

International Convention Relating to Economic Statistics (1928)

<http://untreaty.un.org>

Decision by the eleventh General Conference on Weights and Measures, 1960, to adopt the *Système international d'unités* (International System of Units) with the abbreviation SI

<http://www.bipm.fr/en/si/>

ISO 31	Quantities and units
ISO Guide 31	Reference materials – Contents of certificates and labels
ISO 31-0	General principles
ISO 31-1	Space and time
ISO 31-2	Periodic and related phenomena
ISO 31-3	Mechanics
ISO 31-4	Heat
ISO 31-5	Electricity and magnetism
ISO 31-6	Light and related electromagnetic radiations
ISO 31-7	Acoustics
ISO 31-8	Physical chemistry and molecular physics
ISO 31-9	Atomic and nuclear physics
ISO 31-10	Nuclear reactions and ionizing radiations
ISO 31-11	Mathematical signs and symbols for use in the physical sciences and technology [part 11 is not relevant for this Recommendation]
ISO 31-12	Characteristic numbers
ISO 31-13	Solid state physics
ISO 1000	SI units and recommendations for the use of their multiples and of certain other units
ISO 2955	Information processing - Representation of SI and other units in systems with limited character sets

www.iso.org

UN/ECE Recommendation 20: Codes for units of measurement used in International Trade, Geneva, edition 1985

UN/ECE Recommendation 21: Codes for passengers, types of cargo, packages and packaging materials

<http://www.unece.org/cefact/>

ANSI ASC X12 Data Element Number 355 - Unit or basis for measurement code

<http://www.disa.org/>

Statistical Papers, series M, No.21, Rev.I, (66.XVII.3) World Weights and Measures. Handbook for Statisticians. Statistical Office of the United Nations, New York, 1966

<http://unstats.un.org/>

Statistical Papers, series M, No.52, Rev.I, (E.82.XVII.14) International Trade Statistics. Concepts and Definitions, Statistical Office of the United Nations, New York, 1982

<http://unstats.un.org/>

IX. PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSION IN THE CODE LIST

21. This Recommendation provides a list of code elements for units of measure to be used in the exchange of information. The codes are intended for application in everyday trade transactions where the increasing use of electronic data exchange makes it desirable to establish such codes. For enterprises that use the United Nations system of aligned trade documents (based on the UN Layout-key for trade documents), or use the United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDDED) and/or the United Nations Trade Data Interchange Directory (UNTDID) for Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), the code list provides another international instrument for the harmonization of terms used in trade aiming at greater clarity and facility in the execution of international trade transactions.

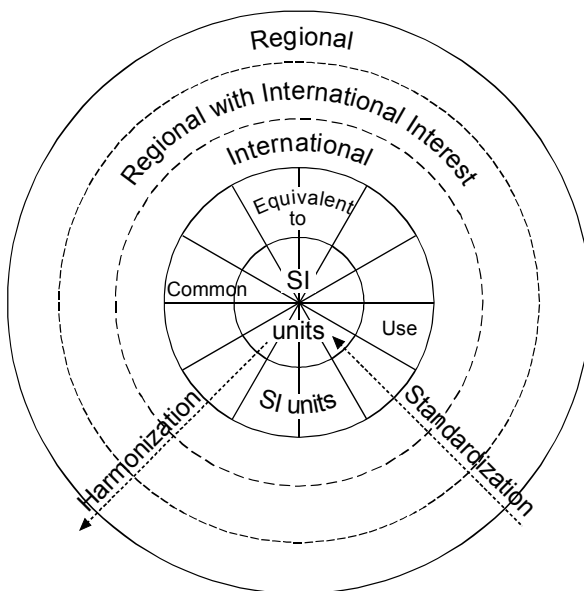
22. In view of the practical aim of the Recommendation, the code list should not be restricted to a single category of units, but should also contain other units of measure, which are widely used in international trade. However, in order to attach importance to the need for worldwide harmonization of units of measure, it was decided to divide the code list into three levels:

- *Level 1 - normative*: the units from ISO 31 in SI notation, including reference unit plus the standard prefixes as established in ISO 31;
- *Level 2 - normative equivalent*: the units based on the equivalents of the SI units;
- *Level 3 - informative*: sets of units, which do not fit into the first two levels but which are required to satisfy user needs. This includes:
 - units that are widely used in the international environment;
 - units used at regional level, that may have a broader international interest;
 - units, that are regional or sectorial only.

The total structure is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2

UOM "Onion Skin" Levels
Of Standardization



23. When reaching these agreements, the UN/ECE took into account that no binding provisions exist, worldwide, for using a special system. For example, on this point the International Convention Relating to Economic Statistics states only:

"The unit or units of measure in which quantities of each commodity are stated -weight, length, area, capacity, etc. - shall be precisely defined."

"When the quantity of goods of any kind is expressed in any unit or units of measure other than weight, an estimate of the average weight of each unit, or multiple of units, shall be shown in the annual returns"

In case of weights, precise definitions shall be given of the meaning of terms such as 'gross weight', 'net weight' and 'legal net weight', with due regard to the varying significance of the same term when applied to different classes of goods". (Statistical Papers, series M, No. 52, Rev.I, para. 118)

24. In this context the United Nations Statistical Office notes:

"It will be noted that this permits countries to use units suited to domestic purposes, while at the same time making it possible to convert these units to units of weight for purposes of international comparability. Because of the substantial divergence in the units of quantity used by countries, such a provision offers the greatest possibility of obtaining uniform quantity information at low cost. Thus, Governments are urged to take advantage of this option whenever possible". (Statistical Papers, series M, No. 52, Rev.I, para. 118)

25. The imperial system was introduced in 1824. The United Kingdom Weights and Measures Act 1963 establishes units of both the imperial and metric systems as "United Kingdom primary standards". A substantial number of imperial units were no longer officially authorized for use as from 1 September 1980 including square inch, square mile, cubic foot, grain, stone, hundredweight, ton and horsepower. The deadline for phasing out the remaining imperial units is stated in Official Journal of the European Communities No. L357 of 7 December 1989

26. Inch/pound units of measure used in the United States, often referred to as "United States of America customary units" are generally the same as those of the imperial system; there are, however, some important exceptions for capacity, length and weight units. Private and official action is taken in the United States of America to increase the use of SI units.

X. CODE STRUCTURE AND PRESENTATION

27. The names of SI, imperial and other units of measure are standardized, as are their symbols. Laws and regulations affecting foreign trade often make the use of these symbols obligatory when an abbreviated version of the name of a unit is required.

28. ISO 1000 includes rules for writing SI units and symbols: clause 6.1 is reproduced below:

"6.1 Unit symbols shall be printed in roman (upright) type (irrespective of the type used in the rest of the text), shall remain unaltered in the plural, shall be written without a final full stop (period) except for normal punctuation, e.g. at the end of a sentence, and shall be placed after the complete numerical value in the expression for a quantity, leaving a space between the numerical value and the unit symbol".

Unit symbols shall in general be written in lower case letters except that the first letter is written in upper case when the name of the unit is derived from a proper name.

Examples:

m	metre
s	second
A	ampere
Wb	weber

29. The following principles for establishing the code list are reflected in the present Recommendation. Only standard multiples such as mega, giga, shall be used. Non-standard multiples such as 10 mega, 100 mega shall not be coded as separate units. Numeric values, e.g. 10, 25, are not units of measure. Therefore they should not be presented in coded form.

30. The code list is presented in three annexes with the following table columns:

a) STATUS INDICATOR (ST)

An indication of the maintenance status of individual units of measure.

a plus sign (+)	<u>Added</u> . New unit added in this release of the code list
a hash sign (#)	<u>Changed name</u> . Changes to the unit name in this release of the code list
a vertical bar ()	<u>Changed characteristic(s)</u> . Changes other than to the unit name in this release of the code list, e.g. a change to the level/category
a letter D (D)	<u>Deprecated</u> . Units not recommended for use by the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM)
a letter X (X)	<u>Marked as deleted</u> . Units marked as deleted will be retained indefinitely in the code lists. When appropriate, these units may subsequently be reinstated via the maintenance process
an equals sign (=)	<u>Reinstated</u> . Units previously marked as deleted and reinstated in this release of the code list

b) QUANTITY

The name of the physical phenomenon being measured.

- In levels 1 and 2 (SI or SI equivalent), the phenomena pertaining to a certain category are listed under a heading giving the name of the relevant part in ISO 31.
- In level 3 they are broken down into the 9 categories as defined below under level/category.

c) LEVEL/CATEGORY

Identification of the normative or informative relevance of the unit:

level 1 - normative = SI normative units, standard and commonly used multiples

NOTE: standard multiples are identified with "S" and commonly used multiples with "M" e.g. "1 metre", "1S centimetre", "1M hectometre").

level 2 – normative equivalent = SI normative equivalent units (UK, US, etc.) and commonly used multiples

level 3 – informative = 9 categories of informative units (units of count and other miscellaneous units), invariably with no comprehensive conversion factor to SI. These units are provided for information and to facilitate the assignment and usage of a common code value to represent such units:

- 3.1 Qualified base units from levels 1 and 2
- 3.2 Sales units
- 3.3 Packing units
- 3.4 Shipping and transportation units
- 3.5 Industry specific units (various)
- 3.6 Information technology units
- 3.7 Integers/Numbers/Ratios
- 3.8 Multiples/Fractions/Decimals
- 3.9 Miscellaneous

d) NAME

The name of the unit of measure.

e) DESCRIPTION

A plain text specification of the named unit of measure, not exceeding 350 characters in length and in English. It should be noted that such descriptions shall be progressively introduced for existing entries and where possible, shall be taken from recognized sources. All new entries having no conversion factor to SI units shall be applied to the code list with a description. A description is optional for units provided with a conversion factor.

f) CONVERSION FACTOR TO SI

The value used to convert units to the equivalent SI unit when applicable.

g) REPRESENTATION SYMBOL

The symbol used to represent the unit of measure as in ISO 31.

h) COMMON CODE

This is the recommended single list of standard codes which is based on the following conventions:

- The representation format for the code values shall be alphanumeric variable length 3 characters (an..3); wherever possible, existing code values are retained according to the following order of precedence for assigning values:
 - a) alphabetic code values for units of measure as in UN/ECE Recommendation 20, edition 1985
 - b) alphanumeric code values for units of measure as in ANSI ASC X12 data element number 355
 NOTE: Where there are both UN/ECE Recommendation 20 and ANSI ASC X12 data element number 355 code values for a unit of measure, the UN/ECE Recommendation 20

code value only is retained.

- c) code values for new units of measure shall be allocated by the UN/ECE Secretariat, typically based on sequential coding according to the format Alpha-Numeric-Numeric (ann) starting with A01 up to Z99.

31. The three annexes are structured accordingly:

- **Annex I** – Code elements listed by quantity category. This annex is normative and contains only level 1 and 2 entries. The columns represented in this annex are:
 - **Quantity**
 - Status Indicator
 - Level/category
 - Name
 - Description
 - Representation symbol
 - Conversion factor to SI
 - Common Code
- **Annex II** – Code elements listed by name. This annex is informative and contains all level 1, 2 and 3 entries. The columns represented in this annex are:
 - Status Indicator
 - **Name**
 - Description
 - Level/category
 - Representation symbol
 - Conversion factor to SI
 - Common Code
- **Annex III** – Code elements listed by common code. This annex is informative and contains all level 1, 2 and 3 entries. The columns represented in this annex are:
 - Status Indicator
 - **Common Code**
 - Name
 - Description
 - Level/category
 - Representation symbol
 - Conversion factor to SI

XI. MAINTENANCE AND UPDATING

32. Recommendation 20 is maintained on behalf of UN/CEFACT by the by the UN/CEFACT Information Content Management Group (ICG).

33. Proposals for updating this Recommendation should be addressed to the Trade Facilitation Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland or by email to:

uncefact@unece.org

34. Draft revisions to the body text and/or code list of this Recommendation shall be issued by the ICG when required and shall be made available on the ICG Web site:

<http://www.disa.org/cefact-groups/icg>

35. Draft revisions shall be subject to a public comment period of at least two months. UN/CEFACT Heads of Delegation shall be notified of the availability of a draft revision and the period for comment. Following the conclusion of the comment period, the ICG shall address all comments received. Depending on the comments received, the ICG shall issue a new draft edition for comment or shall prepare a final edition for approval.

36. Final revisions to the body text of this Recommendation shall be approved by the UN/CEFACT Plenary and shall be made available on the UN/CEFACT Web site:

<http://www.unece.org/cefact>

37. Final revisions to the code lists of this Recommendation shall be approved by the ICG Plenary and notified to the UN/CEFACT Plenary. These revisions shall be made available on the UN/CEFACT Web site.

XII. DISCLAIMER

38. All information provided in this Recommendation, including in its associated annexes, is provided "as is", without warranty of any kind, either express or implied, including, without limitation, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a specific purpose and non-infringement. UN/CEFACT specifically does not make any warranties or representations as to the accuracy or completeness of any information published in this Recommendation. Under no circumstances shall UN/CEFACT be liable for any loss, damage, or expense incurred or suffered that is claimed to have resulted from the use of this Recommendation. The use of this Recommendation is at the user's sole risk.