



United Nations

What UNECE does for you

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UNECE works for better and convergent regulations



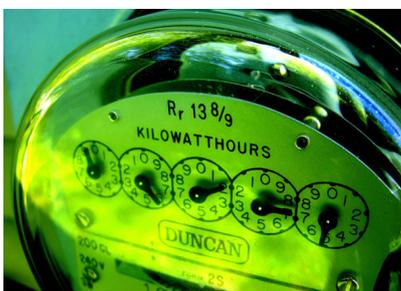
Lorenza Jachia, Acting Secretary of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, explains the ECE work on standards.

“Exporting a product to more than one country can be like navigating a complex maze, because different and sometimes conflicting regulations apply. Even in sectors where regulations are similar, importing authorities may require their own tests to admit the product to their market. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) works to lower costly barriers to trade, protect consumers’ and workers’ safety, and preserve the natural environment.”

What is the purpose of your work?

Our purpose is to protect consumers and workers from the threats of non-compliant and dangerous products and equipment by enhancing cooperation among rule-makers and enforcement authorities. We seek to reduce the costs of trade – especially for small and medium-sized enterprises – by ensuring that products need neither to be customized nor tested several times to reach different markets. We also strive to protect the natural environment by promoting the use of innovative products. We encourage development by bringing international standards and the knowledge they embody to the production floor. To achieve these goals, we promote the convergence of technical regulations with international standards and best practice.

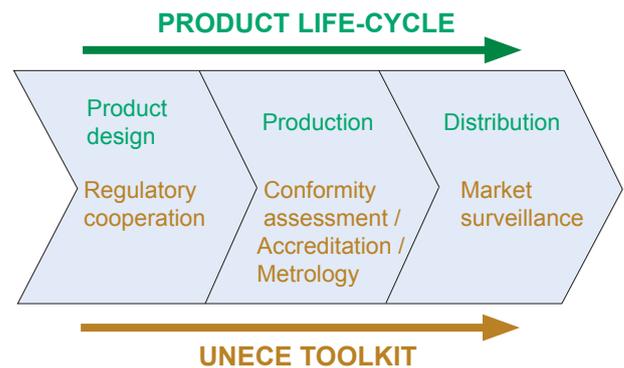
What do you mean by technical regulations?



Technical regulations define the features of a product that will be commercialized. Regulations are important at all stages of a product’s life-cycle – from design, through production and distribution.

Why are these regulations important?

A product design is guided by technical regulations. At each stage of production, conformity is assessed. Finally, market surveillance authorities use technical regulations to check that commercialized products meet the mandatory requirements.



What happens when technical regulations are different across countries?

Technical regulations could never be valid for the whole world because they express a country’s unique needs and circumstances. Clearly when regulations differ, manufacturers will need to invest considerable resources to understand the rules and tailor their merchandise accordingly. In some cases, producers will also need to obtain a certificate of conformity for each of the markets.

What is a certificate of conformity?

This is an official document that guarantees that a product has been inspected, verified and complies with the technical regulations in force where the product is marketed.

Are these certificates recognized internationally?

This is an important question. In some sectors technical regulations are similar, yet a certificate of conformity is still required to enter each market. Obtaining a certificate of conformity is very costly, especially for countries not equipped with internationally accredited laboratories and test houses. This accumulation of certificates does not always deliver an optimal level of protection to the end-user.

What solutions do you envisage?

According to the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement of the World Trade Organization, technical rules should not be used as barriers to trade. We therefore encourage rule makers to base their regulations on international standards. By providing a common denominator to the norms that would apply on different markets, it reduces the need to customize each product. We also promote common methods of testing in order to establish confidence in certificates delivered by institutions from other countries.

Why do you recommend that national authorities make reference to international standards in national technical regulations?

Standards should be tools of first recourse to guarantee safety, efficiency and environmental conservation. International standards combine the knowledge and expertise of producers, consumers, market surveillance authorities, testing houses, certification and accreditation bodies, as well as leading scientists, academics and environmental specialists. During the standards development process, viewpoints from all countries should receive a fair hearing and no one interest group should dominate. Additionally, international standards are revised and updated regularly to fulfil the public safety needs of industrial development.

Is reference to international standards in regulations sufficient to facilitate trade?

No. That is why the Working Party has adopted a Recommendation that enshrines an International Model, i.e. a set of principles and procedures that countries can implement to approximate their technical regulations. At the core of the Model is the concept of Common Regulatory Objectives (CROs). For each sector, these objectives address legitimate Government concerns related to public health, safety or protection of the environment. CROs are jointly defined preferably with reference to international standards. They specify (a) how compliance is assessed, (b) which conformity assessment bodies are recognized as competent, and (c) what competence criteria are to be fulfilled, among other flanking issues.



Are these agreements binding?

No. Authorities should transpose these agreements into national technical regulations. Once this is done, products that have been assessed in the exporting country as compliant with the CROs can automatically be sold in other markets with no further assessment.

Information Service
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41(0)22 917 44 44 Fax: +41(0)22 917 05 05
E-mail: info.ece@unece.org Website: <http://www.unece.org>

Has the International model been used?

Yes. Two initiatives have been launched on telecom products and on earth-moving machinery. In particular, CROs were adopted by the Working Party in 2003 for some telecom equipment: personal computers (PCs); PC peripherals, legacy Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) terminals; Bluetooth, Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN); Global Standard for Mobile Telecommunication (GSM); and International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT-2000). For earth-moving machinery, CROs were adopted in 2004. Currently, two initiatives are underway on equipment for explosive environments and pipeline safety.



How do the sectoral initiatives work?

In practice, when countries wish to harmonize their technical regulations in a specific sector according to the International Model, they announce their intention through a Call for Participation and invite all United Nations Member States to join their initiative. The process typically starts with a survey of existing regulations in the relevant sector in the different jurisdictions. It aims to identify possible building blocks for CROs.

What is the role of the UNECE secretariat in this process?

The secretariat provides assistance during the negotiation process and promotes implementation of the CROs. We work closely with United Nations Member States, but also with standards-setting organizations, certification and accreditation bodies, test houses, international schemes for the certification of conformity assessment to standards, with business, civil society, and other international organizations. It is important that all stakeholders share their knowledge and their concerns.

Who benefits from this work? And why do these activities belong in the United Nations?

Governments benefit because they can find optimal tools to achieve their regulatory objectives. Industries face lower transaction costs and can compete on a fairer basis in larger markets. Finally, consumers, workers and the environment are protected more effectively from hazards. The activities of the Working Party therefore contribute to achieving the core objectives of the United Nations. In the end, better and convergent technical regulations benefit everybody.

For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/trade/wp6/> or contact [Lorenza Jachia \(trade@unece.org\)](mailto:Lorenza.Jachia@unece.org)