



GUIDE 23

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Methods of indicating conformity with standards for third-party certification systems

[ISO/IEC Guide 23:1982](#)

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Foreword

This document was drawn up by the ISO Committee on certification, ISO/CERTICO. It was approved by the IEC Council in June 1981 and by the ISO Council in December 1981.

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GUIDE 23-1982 (E)

Methods of indicating conformity with standards for third-party certification systems

0 Introduction

With the increased development of international trade and the increased demands by government authorities, purchasers, consumers and others to establish whether a product or service conforms with standards, it is becoming more and more important that the methods of indicating such conformity should be clearly understood.

The questions which arise in considering this need would include :

- what is being certified?
- by whom is it certified?
- who requires the certification?
- why is evidence of conformity required?
- how best is information on conformity transmitted to the buyer, user (consumer) or government authorities?

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1 Scope and field of application

This Guide lays down methods of indicating conformity with standards and reference thereto in standards. Whilst it is directed specifically to conformity with standards, it is recognized that it may be equally applicable to conformity with other technical specifications. It applies to indications of conformity made under the authority of a certification body. This Guide is primarily intended for International Standards but may be used for national standards or other purposes.

2 Reference

ISO Guide 2-1980, *General terms and their definitions concerning standardization and certification*.

3 Definitions

The relevant definitions which appear in ISO Guide 2 are applicable, except that, for the purpose of this document, the following definitions apply :

3.1 mark of conformity : A legally registered certification mark applied by or issued under the procedures of a third-party certification system for a product or service which is in conformity with specific standards or other technical specifications.

3.2 certificate of conformity : A document issued under the procedures of a third-party certification system and attesting that a product or a service is in conformity with specific standards or other technical specifications.¹⁾

1) It is recognized that certificates of conformity may have different meanings and applications in different countries.

4 Who requires information on conformity with standards?

4.1 The responsible **manufacturer** may require that it be known that his product is in conformity with the relevant standard.

4.2 The **purchaser** may need to know that the product he has purchased meets the requirements which have been specified.

The word “purchaser” does not necessarily imply that he is the ultimate user of the complete finished product. For instance, he may purchase steel bars for machining into, for example, fasteners.

4.3 **Inspection organizations, insurance companies, etc.** may need to have information on conformity in order to have confidence in the product for which they are taking a risk.

4.4 **Regulatory bodies**, such as governments, etc. may need evidence that products covered by legislation meet the required standards.

5 Categories of purchasers

Purchasers listed in 4.2 can be categorized as follows :

5.1 Consumer (i.e. the individual member of the general public)

The consumer is assumed to have little or no technical knowledge and seldom has access to the standard.

5.2 Informed purchaser

The informed purchaser is assumed to have sufficient knowledge to be able to understand standards within his field of work.

6 Categories of standards to which conformity can be certified

6.1 General

Conformity may be demanded for various categories (types) of standards. The question which is to be faced is what method of indicating conformity could be applied in order to convey to the user, purchaser, inspection organizations, regulatory bodies, etc., the information on conformity with the standard and on whose authority this is stated. The categories in which product standards fall (for the range of products from raw materials and component items through to end-items) can usually be grouped into two main types :

6.1.1 Comprehensive product standards

Such standards have the objective of specifying the essential characteristics, requirements, test methods, etc. necessary to enable the product to serve its intended purpose.

6.1.2 Standards for specific properties

These standards cover specific properties and are not necessarily comprehensive product standards. They may specify one specific property, such as “the colour fastness to light” of textiles, or they may specify more than one property. This type of standard is frequently used for regulatory purposes, for example where only the safety aspect of a product is specified.

7 Methods of indicating conformity with standards

7.1 Mark of conformity

A mark of conformity is limited for use in a third-party certification system to indicate that compliance with the standard is under the supervision of such a system.

In implementing the “mark of conformity” method, it is necessary to exercise care to indicate clearly the coverage intended.

In cases where only certain components of a product bear a certification mark, care should be taken not to mislead the consumer into assuming that the entire product is certified.

A mark of conformity is to be used only where it relates to all the requirements of a standard and not to selected sections or characteristics and should be operated under specific rules applicable thereto. A permit or licence for the use of a mark of conformity is issued by a certification body.

7.2 Certificate of conformity

The aim of this method is to provide, for the user, information as to the standards covered by the certificate. The method may be used to indicate conformity with comprehensive product standards or standards covering specific properties. Certificates of conformity may relate to all the requirements of a standard or to selected sections or characteristics only. Certificates of conformity are issued under the procedures of a third party certification system and may be either of a voluntary or mandatory nature. They should contain at least the following information :

- a) name and address of the certification body;
- b) name and address of the manufacturer;
- c) identification of the product certified and the lot, batch, serial number, model or type number to which the certification applies;
- d) reference to the appropriate standard (title, number, and year of issue); when the certification applies to only a portion of a standard, the applicable portion(s) should be clearly identified;
- e) date of issue of certificate;
- f) signature and title of authorized officer.

The information supplied shall be such that there is a capability of relating the certificate to the test results on which it was based.

The rules of a third-party certification system may also specify additional information to be included.

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8 Limitations on reference to marks of conformity and certificates of conformity in standards

The primary uses of standards are as technical documents in a buyer-seller relationship or as the basis of technical regulations. It follows that the inclusion in the standard of requirements indicating conformity requires careful consideration. An International Standard which stipulates a requirement to indicate conformity (marks of conformity, certificates of conformity), may not be implementable by all ISO and IEC member bodies because of national, legal or other provisions.

Matters relating to marks of conformity or certificates of conformity should not appear in standards but in separate documents which should relate to all aspects connected with the implementation of marks of conformity or certificates of conformity.

In the case of marks of conformity or certificates of conformity issued by or under the procedure of a third-party certification system, such documents should be established by certification bodies.

Markings limited to indicate a designation, code or classification are not considered to be "marks of conformity" and may be included in the standard.

9 Types of mark of conformity

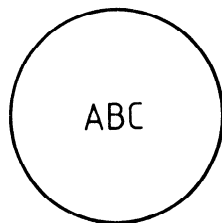
9.1 Recommended marks of conformity

Whilst it may be desirable to have differing marks of conformity to distinguish the difference between a mark of conformity for products complying with a comprehensive product standard from a mark of conformity indicating that a product complies with a standard dealing only with specific properties, it will not be easily understood by the consumer and could lead to misinterpretation. Differentiation would require a legend below each mark.

At the international level, where the relevant marks of conformity are intended to be internationally acceptable, the problem is further complicated by the question of languages. Whilst the international languages of ISO and IEC are English, French and Russian, the recipients of the products are not necessarily sufficiently versed in other than their native tongue to be able to read a legend in English, French or Russian.

It is suggested that the mark of conformity be preferably used for products complying with the requirements of a comprehensive product standard.

Example :



ABC 59-1974*

In cases where the standard contains different grades or types, descriptive words — but preferably symbols which are universally understandable — should appear in close proximity to the mark of conformity to indicate which grade or type is being certified.

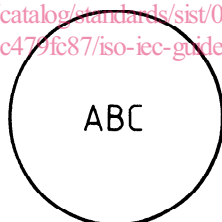
If the grade or value has not been stipulated in the standard, but left open for any grade or value to be stated by the manufacturer, then such grades or values should appear in close proximity to the mark, indicating the property or characteristic and its stated grade or value.

9.2 Further considerations

If, after all the factors have been considered, essential reasons still make it desirable to apply a mark of conformity to a product complying with a standard which only covers specific properties of the product, it is suggested that the mark of conformity together with the reference to the standard as well as a short indication of the aspects covered by the standard, may be applied to the product. It is preferable to use symbols which are universally understandable rather than descriptive words.

Example :

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ABC 224-1979 — Colour fastness only*

However, it is recommended that consideration should rather be given in such circumstances to the use of certificates of conformity which would be more precise in their information.

10 Indication of the certifying authority in the case where an international certification system using a mark of conformity is in operation

Any international certification system which utilizes a mark of conformity should be administered by the certification bodies which participate in the system. It is therefore necessary to determine the need to indicate on the product the identity of the certification body administering the mark. Care should be taken that such a designation, when used, is not confused with national or other marks of conformity.

11 Information for consumers

The concepts of marks of conformity, certificates of conformity and marking to indicate designations must be understandable to the consumer. Extensive information effort will be required to ensure that the consumer is aware of the meaning of these concepts.

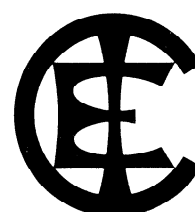
* This is only an example. The inclusion or not of the date of the standard or other forms of traceability to the standard, or the identification of the property being certified is a matter to be determined by the certification system.

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