TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ISO/TS 17033

First edition
2019-08

Ethical claims and supporting information — Principles and requirements

Déclarations éthiques et informations associées — Principes et exigences

iTeh STANDARD PREVIEW
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Contents

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents) or the IEC list of patent declarations received (see http://patents.iec.ch).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso .org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by the ISO Committee on Conformity Assessment (CASCO), in collaboration with the ISO Committee on Consumer Policy (COPOLCO).

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Ethical claims are being made increasingly often in the marketplace. They cover a wide range of issues relating to environmental sustainability, social and economic justice and animal welfare, among others. This corresponds to increased societal interest in the ethical aspects of organizations, their products and services and supply chains.

Ethical claims can be declared by manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or anyone else likely to benefit from such claims. These claims can take the form of statements, symbols or graphics on product or package labels, or in product literature, technical bulletins, advertising, publicity, telemarketing, as well as digital or electronic media, such as the Internet.

The situation is complex — ethical claims vary in scope as they can be single-issue or cover a variety of topics. Some ethical claims are declared individually outside specified programmes whereas others are declared according to a programme, which is overseen by an operating entity. There are also many different communication channels and variations in geographical coverage and types of recognition.

An increasing number of relevant standards and assessment methodologies exist. However, the subject is complicated by there being different individual views about what is ethical and therefore this document does not define ethical behaviour.

The proliferation of ethical claims has led to confusion in the marketplace, particularly where terms are used that are insufficiently or inconsistently defined, and where the scope of a claim, the basis of conformance or method of verification is unclear.

It is important that ethical claims are accurate and not misleading to avoid negative market effects such as trade barriers or unfair competition. The evaluation used by those who make ethical claims needs to be clear, transparent and documented so that those who purchase or can potentially purchase, use or dispose of products can be assured of the reliability of the claims.

This document is intended to facilitate the communication of accurate, credible and verifiable information about the ethical aspects of a product, process, service or organization. It is relevant for the creation of new claims, the improvement of existing claims, and to assist users in understanding claims already in the market place.

In this document, the following verbal forms are used:

— "shall" indicates a requirement;

— "should" indicates a recommendation;

— "may" indicates a permission;

— "can" indicates a possibility or a capability.

Further details can be found in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

For the purposes of research, users are encouraged to share their views on this document and their priorities for changes to future editions. Click on the link below to take part in the online survey:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SQYJVDJ

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Ethical claims and supporting information — Principles and requirements

1 Scope

This document contains principles and requirements for developing and declaring ethical claims and for providing supporting information, where specific standards have not been developed, or to supplement existing standards.

This document is intended for use by all types of organizations and is applicable to all types of ethical claims relating to a product, process, service or organization.

This document can also be used by those seeking a better understanding of ethical claims and their use. This document can support the development of programmes for aspect-specific and sector-specific ethical claims.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at http://www.electropedia.org/

3.1
ethical claim
statement, symbol or graphic that declares one or more ethical aspect of a product, process, service or organization

Note 1 to entry: An ethical claim can take the form of a statement, symbol or graphic on a product or package label, in product literature, in technical bulletins, in advertising or in publicity, amongst other things.

Note 2 to entry: Ethical claims can be declared by persons or organizations such as producers, manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or communities.

Note 3 to entry: Ethical aspects can include a broad range of social, economic justice and sustainability issues, e.g. local sourcing, fair trade, humane treatment of animals. Many ethical aspects are described in international documents and programmes identified in the Bibliography.

3.2
explanatory statement
explanation which is needed or given so that an *ethical claim* (3.1) can be properly understood by a user or potential user of the product

[SOURCE: ISO 14021:2016, 3.1.7, modified — The words "environmental claim" have been replaced with "ethical claim" and the words "purchaser, potential purchaser or user" have been replaced with "user or potential user".]

3.3
life cycle
consecutive and interlinked stages of a product system, from raw material acquisition or generation from natural resources to final disposal

Note 1 to entry: Not all *ethical claims* (3.1) relate to the full life cycle.

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.1, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.4
comparative ethical claim
ethical claim (3.1) regarding the superiority or equivalence on one product, process, service or organization versus another product, process, service or organization, or one product, process, service or organization over time

3.5
supporting data
verifiable technical information that substantiates the *ethical claim* (3.1)

3.6
supporting information
available material that supports the *ethical claim* (3.1)

4   Principles

4.1   General

4.1.1   The principles described in this clause provide the basis for the requirements specified in this document. This document does not give specific requirements for all ethical claims. These principles should be applied as guidance for the decisions that can be made in unanticipated situations. Principles are not requirements.

4.1.2   An ethical claim declares an organization's achievement with respect to social, economic justice or sustainability issues (e.g. local sourcing, fair trade, humane treatment of animals and others).

4.1.3   Ethical behaviour equates to policy and action that enables an organization to demonstrate its care for concerns including ecological integrity, social and economic justice and democracy, non-violence and peace.

4.1.4   An ethical claim communicates that an organization achieves established good practices and works continuously to improve these practices.

4.2   Reliability

4.2.1   Principle

Ethical claims are accurate, verifiable, relevant and not misleading.

4.2.2   Rationale

Trust is a prerequisite for ethical claims to be accepted as genuine by prospective users. Telling the truth is fundamental to gaining the trust of interested parties. Therefore, ethical claims are based on substantiated evidence so that interested parties can be sure that their action, based on that ethical claim, contributes to a common good.

4.3 Transparency

4.3.1 Principle

Information concerning the procedure, methodology, and any criteria and assumptions used to support a claim is publicly available and readily accessible.

4.3.2 Rationale

4.3.2.1 Timely and relevant information is available to enable interested parties to substantiate the ethical claim and make an informed decision.

4.3.2.2 Information providers consider the best way of providing timely and relevant information on the product or at point of sale, together with further information (e.g. on company website) for consumers or other interested parties who wish to undertake further research into the claim.

4.4 Relevance

4.4.1 Principle

Ethical claims consider the relevant aspects and reflect best scientific understanding, innovation and applicable codes of good practice, adapted where necessary to local conditions. The development of ethical claims takes into consideration the relevant aspects of the life cycle of a product or the supply chains of an organization.

4.4.2 Rationale

The scope of the ethical claim indicates key aspects, which are fundamental to the ethical performance of the respective product, service, process or organization. Relevance is maintained by adapting the ethical claim to reflect innovation, best practice and differences in conditions. This also enables interested parties to have confidence in the continued relevance of the ethical claim.

4.5 Involvement of interested parties

4.5.1 Principle

Ethical claims are based on criteria developed with the involvement of interested parties, where relevant, including those in developing countries.

4.5.2 Rationale

Ethical claims involve collaborative approaches which increase acceptance and credibility among all interested parties. This behaviour can lead to improvements in the quality of the underlying evidence that supports the claims.

4.6 Equity

4.6.1 Principle

Ethical claims are developed and declared after informed and objective consideration of the distribution of impacts across generations, regions and social groups, and between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

4.6.2 Rationale

There are many ethical aspects and the pursuit of one outcome can have implications for others. The information supporting an ethical claim is based on a life cycle perspective and balanced behaviour, to ensure that while enhancing one aspect of good performance the potential for negative or unintended consequences is addressed.

5 General requirements

5.1.1 The scope of the ethical claim shall:

a) accurately reflect the ethical issue to be addressed by the claim;

b) identify all aspects of the product, service, process or organization to be included in the ethical claim;

c) identify any relevant aspects of the product, service, process or organization that will not be included in the ethical claim.

NOTE   If an ethical claim relates to conformity with a particular standard, it is important that the ethical claim is specific in relation to that particular standard and does not broadly imply ethical production.

5.1.2 The requirements of this document shall apply to all aspects that are identified as being included in the scope of the ethical claim.

5.1.3 This document provides requirements for ethical claims. Where appropriate consensus-based standards exist that have more detailed requirements for aspect-specific or sector specific ethical claims, those more specific standards shall be used.

5.1.4 Ethical claims shall be developed with the involvement of relevant interested parties, including developing countries.

5.1.5 Ethical claims shall:

a) be accurate and not misleading (see 4.2);

b) be unlikely to result in misinterpretation (see 4.2);

c) avoid exaggeration and omissions of facts (see 4.2);

d) take into consideration the fitness for purpose of the product, process, service or organization to ensure that the ethical claim does not mask poor performance (see 4.2);

e) be robust and consistent in order to help users make informed choices (see 4.2);

f) be factual (see 4.2 and 4.3);

g) have a substantiated and verifiable basis (see 4.2 and 4.3);

h) be supported by documented and verifiable information that is publicly available — where confidential information is used to support the ethical claim, it shall be verified by a competent party (see 4.3);

i) provide adequate supporting information that is accurate and not misleading, to enable users to make informed purchasing decisions (see 4.3);

j) be consistent across all instances where it is made — where the ethical claim is limited in its scope, the limitation shall be stated each time the ethical claim is made (see 4.4);

k) take into consideration relevant aspects within the scope of the claim in order to avoid the potential for one impact to be increased in the process of decreasing another (see 4.4);

l) only relate to an ethical aspect that either exists or is likely to be realized, during the lifetime of the product, process, services or organization (see 4.4);

m) address major improvements in areas that matter to ensure that significant aspects (hotspots) are covered and that there are genuine benefits (see 4.4);

n) be relevant to the area where the corresponding ethical impact occurs (see 4.4);

NOTE   A process-related claim can be made anywhere, so long as the ethical impact occurs in the area where the process is located. The area will be determined by the nature of the impact.

o) where applicable, recognize and preserve traditional and local knowledge that contributes to environmental protection and human well-being (see 4.5);

p) employ a precautionary approach (see 4.6);

q) provide information that is relevant to the actual circumstances (see 4.6);

r) be reassessed and updated as necessary to reflect changes in technology, competitive products or other circumstances that could alter the accuracy of the claim (see 4.4 and 4.6);

s) be relevant to the particular scope of the claim and used only in an appropriate context or setting (see 4.6).

An overview of 5.1.5 is presented in the flowcharts in Annex B.

6 Requirements for comparative ethical claims

6.1   Comparative ethical claims may be made between an organization's own product, service or process and one of its own current or former products, services or processes or the supply chain. Comparative ethical claims may also be made in respect to an organization over time. Comparisons of ethical claims over time are referred to as performance tracking.

6.2   When the supporting data for an ethical claim is intended to be used for performance tracking, i.e. the calculation of the change over time, for one specific product, service, process or organization, the following requirements for the data shall be met:

a) the assessments shall be carried out for different points in time;

b) the change over time shall be calculated using the same method for all subsequent assessments.

6.3   Comparative ethical claims shall be evaluated against one or both of the following:

a) an organization's own prior process;

b) an organization's own prior product or service.

6.4   The comparison shall only be made using a recognized methodology and, where relevant, internationally recognized standards (8.3).

6.5   In order to support an improvement being claimed, the comparison needs to be supported by evidence derived from objective and statistically valid data.

6.6   Comparative ethical claims involving all aspects of the subject of the claim shall be:

a) quantified and calculated using the same units of measurement;

b) based on the same product model or same stage of the supply chain;