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## GUIDE 74

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**Graphical symbols — Technical  
guidelines for the consideration  
of consumers' needs**

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## 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.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

Draft Guides adopted by the responsible Committee or Group are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as a Guide requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

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.

ISO/IEC Guide 74 was prepared jointly by the ISO *Committee on consumer policy* (COPOLCO), and Technical Committee ISO/TC 145, *Graphical symbols*.

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## Introduction

Poorly designed and researched graphical symbols, and also the proliferation of graphical symbols with the same intended meaning, can cause confusion for consumers. Such problems will become ever more common in an age of mass travel, mobility of labour, and global trading unless graphical symbols are designed, evaluated and standardized in accordance with procedures set out in the relevant International Standards.

Both the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) have published International Standards that specify the procedures to be followed when producing and standardizing graphical symbols.

Without doubt, graphical symbols can have important benefits in the field of communication, for example,

- they have visual impact,
- they can provide information in a compact form,
- they can provide information in a visual form that is independent of language, and
- they can guide the viewer to a desired outcome or appropriate decision.

However, these benefits are not always achieved in practice and the purpose of this Guide is to ensure that the needs of consumers are adequately addressed when a possible new requirement for a graphical symbol is being considered. If a symbol is to be effective and widely understood, it has to be used frequently, and for the same function. This will help create familiarity for the user. In the case of graphical symbols used on products or equipment, it will reduce the need for consumers to refer repeatedly to the users' manual. However, there will be instances when optimum results can only be achieved by the provision of supplementary text.

It is important for consumers that graphical symbols should clearly and successfully convey the intended message. In particular, they should differentiate between information that relates to safety requirements (including those associated with unsafe use or the misuse of products and equipment) and those which relate to non-safety information. It is therefore recommended that when technical committees consider the development of graphical symbols intended to convey messages to consumers, they ensure that the relevant groups are involved in the development process. This could be through consumer representation on the committee, through undertaking research on consumer usage, or both.

# Graphical symbols — Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers' needs

**IMPORTANT** — The colours represented in the electronic file of this Guide can be neither viewed on screen nor printed as true representations. Although the copies of this Guide printed by ISO have been produced to correspond (with an acceptable tolerance as judged by the naked eye) to the requirements of ISO 3864-1, it is not intended that these printed copies be used for colour matching. Instead, consult ISO 3864-1 which provides colorimetric and photometric properties together with, as a guideline, references from colour order systems.

## 1 Scope

This Guide gives procedures for the development of graphical symbols for

- public information,
- use in safety signs and product safety labels, and
- use on equipment and products.

Such graphical symbols can be included in consumer documentation.

This Guide does not cover road traffic signs and graphical symbols for use in technical documentation.

Rules for the design of graphical symbols are given in International Standards. This Guide brings together information on relevant international reference documents and standards to assist technical committees and designers to follow “best practice” when considering the need for a new graphical symbol.

**NOTE** This guidance is also applicable at a regional and national level. For example, procedural guidance for CEN technical committees on the preparation of graphical symbols exists in *Guidance — Graphical symbols* in the CEN Business Operations Support System (BOSS): URL <http://www.cenorm.be/boss/>.

## 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 3864-1, *Graphical symbols — Safety colours and safety signs — Part 1: Design principles for safety signs in workplaces and public areas*

ISO 17724, *Graphical symbols — Vocabulary*

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 17724 apply.

## 4 Relevant international technical committees

### 4.1 General

The international technical committees responsible for producing International Standards for the development, standardization and registration of graphical symbols covered by this Guide are ISO/TC 145 and IEC/SC 3C. These two committees are responsible for establishing principles for the preparation of graphical symbols and for their standardization.

**NOTE** In addition, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU-T) covers international symbols to assist users of telephone services.

Technical Committees drafting standards that make reference to graphical symbols, or include signs that contain graphical symbols, should, in addition to following the advice in this Guide, follow the procedures to be found at the relevant committee's website by accessing the URLs given below.

### 4.2 ISO/TC 145

ISO/TC 145 has three subcommittees:

- SC 1, *Public information symbols*,
- SC 2, *Safety, identification, signs, shapes, symbols and colours*, and
- SC 3, *Graphical symbols for use on equipment*.

The ISO/TC 145 website can be accessed as URL <http://www.iso.org/tc145>. The website also includes contact details for the committee's secretariat.

### 4.3 IEC/SC 3C

IEC/SC 3C covers graphical symbols for use on electrotechnical equipment. The secretariat can be contacted at the following URL:

<https://standards.iec.ch/ai/catalog/standards/iso/6c465d56-4b18-4ce6-91ef-591dc5c3b1af/iso-iec-guide-74-2004>  
<http://www.iec.ch/cgi-bin/procgi.pl/www/iecwww.p?wwwlang=e&wwwprog=dirdet.p&committee=SC&number=3c>

## 5 Preliminary considerations

### 5.1 Conveying the intended message

The intended message can include the identification of an object (product or equipment), indication of the status of an object or the appropriate behavioural response from users. Designers of graphical symbols should therefore

- a) identify the nature of the hazard or message to be conveyed and, in particular, whether it relates to the user or only to the equipment, and
- b) decide on the information that needs to be conveyed to the target audience and how this should be done (e.g. is the need for a graphical symbol for public information, for use as a safety sign and product safety label, or for use on equipment and products).

In the cases of graphical symbols for public information and graphical symbols for use on equipment, identification of an object or the indication of a state or operation may be the most important aspects of the message to be conveyed to consumers.