



ISO 14020 Series International Environmental Labelling Standards

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Report on Progress Resulting from ISO TC207 Meeting, Beijing, June 2007

by

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for

Environment Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a general background on the history of environmental labelling and an overview of the June 2007 meeting of the sub committee, SC3, of ISO technical committee, TC207. ISO TC 207 deals with standards for environmental management systems and SC3 is the sub committee responsible for environmental labelling and declarations. The meeting was one of those regularly scheduled to review the current status of work of TC207, its sub committees and its working groups.

In the 1970s many national and international producers and retailers first identified a commercial benefit in identifying the environmental benefits of their products and services to consumers. At that time, there were no rules or guidance on how to do this and, while many claims were well intentioned, a lot could not be supported by verifiable data and some were blatantly misleading.

Within Canada government and standards bodies made efforts to solve this problem with standards, guidelines and the development of a third party “eco-logo” programme modelled on the successful German “Blue Angel”. The “Environmental Choice” programme created by Environment Canada was the second national programme and incorporated greater transparency and stakeholder participation than was embodied in the “Blue Angel” programme.

Eventually, as part of the development of standards for an internationally acceptable environmental management system, ISO determined the need for international harmonization of the environmental labelling system, identified the various types of labelling to be addressed and established a sub committee under TC207 to carry out the work.

A standard was developed to cover General Principles (ISO 14020) that should be applied to all environmental labelling – whether or not ISO was to develop a specific standard. Unfortunately this document is only being used by those using the other ISO labelling documents. Other labelling schemes, including international ones, do not adhere to some of these key principles.

The ISO process divided environmental labels into three types – Type I, eco-logo programmes (14024), Type II, self declared claims (14021) and Type III, environmental profile data declarations (14025). Those making claims of conformity with the standards for all three types of labels are required to consider all the impacts of the entire life cycle of a product and also to be able to support the claim with verifiable data. The key differences between the different types of labelling are the amount of rigour required in considering the life cycle impacts, the degree of oversight needed on the quality of the data to support the claim and whether or not a programme is required in order to operate a labelling scheme.

These ISO standards were all published between 1999 and 2006 and three of the documents have already gone through a full revision cycle – a maximum of 5 years under ISO rules. All three were re-affirmed without change. The standard on Type III Environmental Profile Data was initially published as a Technical Report and was only recently published as a standard.

The 2005 plenary meeting of SC3 of TC207 in Madrid resolved that all four documents in the 14020 series would be revised together, beginning in 2008 - thus aligning the revision cycles. Ideas for the revision of the documents include additional work on symbols, addressing the issue of international environmental labelling schemes that do not comply with the 14020 series and consolidating all four documents for publication as a single document.

The idea of publishing all four documents as one triggered the further development of a vision for merging the 14020 documents in a manner similar to the recent merger of the ISO

14040 document on Life Cycle Analysis (LCA). Not all those involved with environmental labelling support this concept.

The Plenary meeting of TC207 held in Beijing in June 2007 included a workshop where presenters delivered a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and implementation information on the existing standards for Types I, II and III labelling. Germany presented its vision for merging the documents and Sweden presented a rebuttal to that vision.

Later in the week, discussions identified some possible middle ground and various members of the sub committee were assigned tasks to take SC3 to the 2008 plenary. Stig Hirsback of Denmark is to draft a work plan for circulation by January 2008 to enable input by national committees prior to the plenary meeting. Task groups were established to look at how work might progress on symbols and to survey other international organizations for their information and input on labelling schemes not presently covered by the ISO 14020 standards.

This report concludes with the identification, from a CIAI perspective, of general issues within Canada that relate to environmental labelling and with a list of items on which Canada will need to develop positions prior to participation in the revision discussions at the next plenary session of TC207/SC3.