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THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN ASME CODES AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

ASME International develops over 600 Codes and Standards, many of which have become widely used all around the world. In cases such as the ASME Boiler and Pressure Vessel Code, their use is so common internationally that they have been designated as international standards. As well, conformance to their requirements serves as means to meet many international regulations. The concepts that define which standards can be considered international also define why it is important for ASME to encourage participation by individuals from around the world in its standards development process.

A recent WTO document (G/TBT/1/Rev. 8, Issued May 23, 2002) contains the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) decision on principles for development of international standards. That decision includes the following statement “In order to improve the quality of international standards and to ensure the effective application of the (TBT) Agreement, the Committee agreed that there was a need to develop principles concerning transparency, openness, impartiality and consensus, relevance and effectiveness, coherence and developing country interests that would clarify and strengthen the concept of international standards under the Agreement and contribute to the advancement of its objectives.” It is important to note that the Committee on TBT has intentionally not limited development of international standards to any specific organization, such as ISO or IEC. Standards that are relevant to international markets and are developed using the elements described in the Committee’s statement are international standards, regardless of who the standards’ developer is. ASME International supports this position, which mirrors the process by which all ASME Codes and Standards are developed, and the manner in which ASME Codes and Standards are used internationally.

ASME’s process for developing its Codes and Standards includes most of the elements contained in the Committee on TBT’s statement. The process is open to all interested parties and ASME’s provisions for due process for objecting opinions and full public review of all proposed standards provide transparency. Standards are approved when consensus is achieved among all affected interest groups, none of which can have a majority membership on the standards committee, so impartiality is achieved. Market relevance, effectiveness and coherence of ASME Codes and Standards are demonstrated by the large number of products manufactured to ASME standards around the world, both for domestic use and for import/export trade. ASME Codes and Standards committees currently have some members from interests located outside the USA, but this is an area that must be improved to strengthen the contributions from interests in countries that use ASME Codes and Standards, including developing countries. This is an area where ASME’s accredited organizations membership can be of great assistance.

Those international organizations that are accredited by ASME are encouraged to join in the Codes and Standards development process. In the past, attendance at meetings has been considered essential to committee participation, but with recent advancements in electronic tools used by ASME, it is no longer necessary to be physically present at meetings to participate in the development of Codes and Standards. This represents a great opportunity for ASME accredited companies and their respective engineers to contribute to the development of the standards, to ensure those standards continually provide international market relevance. By doing so, ASME accredited organizations will not only be helping their companies’ competitiveness, but the individual engineers will also benefit from interactions with other committee members during the exchange of information that accompanies standards development.

For more information on the various means of participating in ASME International’s Codes and Standards development, contact William Nothofer, Promotions Manager, ASME International, Three Park Avenue, New York, NY, USA 10016-5990, Tel: 1-212-591-8033, Fax: 1-212-591-7196, e-mail: nothoferw@asme.org.