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TRENDS

ISO TO SET GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, has decided to break new ground in its standard setting activities. While its preexisting scope has been broad indeed, its historical mission has been limited to the world of technical standards. Its new initiative will move in a very different direction, seeking to set out guidelines for the exercise of social responsibility by organizations.

In a press release dated June 30, 2004, ISO announced that the decision had been made at a meeting held in Stockholm in late June that drew representatives from equal numbers of developed and developing countries (with 33 countries in each category). Participants represented business, government, labor, consumers, international and nongovernmental organizations.

The decision taken at the meeting to establish a working group to address the topic of social responsibility followed on the report of an Advisory Group formed in early 2003 to recommend whether or not ISO should become involved in this area, and if so, what the nature and scope of any resulting standard should be. The Advisory Group's activities included surveying the social responsibility guidelines established by numerous other organizations in reaching a decision.

Following the endorsement of the Advisory Group's recommendations and the input of those attending the meeting, the new Working Group was tasked with creating a "guidance document, written in plain language which is understandable and usable by non-specialists, and not for a specification document intended for conformity assessment."

The resolution authorizing the new Working Group also charts a deliberate course among the work products already released by other international bodies.

Specifically, the Working Group is instructed to supplement, rather than seek to supplant, intergovernmental agreements such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and those adopted by the International Labour Organization (and indeed, the Working Group is instructed to actively cooperate with the ILO).

In keeping with the subject matter of the initiative, an effort will be made to provide funding assistance to those whose participation might not otherwise be possible.

Whether or not this new initiative marks a new direction that will expand within ISO, or whether this new focus will inform or affect the activities of ISO in technical areas as well remains to be seen.

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Relevant Links:

For the full text of ISO Resolution 35/204, establishing the Social Responsibility Working Group, see:
www.iso.org/iso/en/info/Conferences/SRConference/resolution.htm