

Copyright American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), 100 Barr Harbor Drive,
PO Box C700, West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2959 USA. All rights reserved.

This electronic file shall be for temporary storage on one computer for purposes of viewing, and/or printing one copy for individual use. Neither the electronic file nor the hard copy print shall be reproduced in any way without written permission from ASTM.

Non-Official Voting Members—Is There a Stigma? _____



The prefix “non” stems from the Latin root meaning “an absence of.” It is often used to convey a less emphatic tone than the prefixes “in” or “un,” which give a word an opposite meaning from its original definition. Consequently, a non-official voting member is simply a voting member without an official vote. There is no stigma to this designation. In fact, the non-official voting member has virtually the same rights and obligations as the official voting member. All members, regardless of voting status, have access to the standards development process, receive all applicable letter ballots, and are encouraged to participate to the fullest extent possible. The distinction between the two forms of voting membership is illustrated by the following two exceptions. The first is that the required 60 percent return on all ballots, the required two-thirds affirmative vote for a valid subcommittee ballot, and the required 90 percent affirmative vote for a valid main committee ballot are solely calculated on the returns from official voting members. The second distinction is that only official voting members may cast a vote to find a negative voter not persuasive or not related to a meeting or by letter ballot.

Why the Official Vote?

Official votes are assigned to committee members according to the principles of equal representation, balance, and one vote per voting interest. Adherence to these principles precludes the

possibility of a disproportionate voice or presence by a voting interest in the consensus process by ensuring that the standards produced by the ASTM technical committee represent a diverse stakeholder interest.

What Is Balance?

Balance is a key element of the standards development philosophy of ASTM. It serves as one of the building blocks that supports the ASTM consensus process in that it regulates and maintains the degree of representation found on a committee. Balance demands that the number of voting users, consumers, and general interest members on a classified committee or subcommittee is greater than or equal to the number of voting producers on that same committee or subcommittee. When no single interest group is capable of domination, the diversity of interests participating in the standards development process is both maintained and protected.

What Is a “Voting Interest?”

ASTM defines voting interest as “an organization, a subsidiary of an organization, or an unassociated individual member having a distinctly separate interest from any other interest with regard to the scope of a committee or subcommittee.” Upon receipt of an application and acceptance by the committee, a member will be given an official vote unless that member’s voting interest has already been assigned an official vote, or the acceptance of that member as an official voter will result in the committee or subcommittee being out of balance. The latter would only apply if the committee or subcommittee is classified.

In most cases, the determination of voting interest is made by the membership secretary at the main committee level and by the subcommittee chairman at the subcommittee level. However, it is perfectly acceptable for multiple members from a single voting interest to decide among themselves who should hold their official vote. The offi-

cial vote may also vary from one subcommittee to another and from subcommittee to main committee representation. Ideally, the “official voter” should be the member who demonstrates the most consistency with regard to meeting attendance and ballot return. It is also important to remember that among multiple members from a single voting interest, there is no requirement that all ballot returns be in agreement. Although coordination of voting interest position is desirable, it is possible for different people from the same voting interest to have differing opinions regarding a particular ballot item.

Why only One Vote per Voting Interest?

A long-standing concern present in any system governed by a consensus voting process is that a single interest will somehow accumulate sufficient strength of numbers to manipulate the process for personal or corporate gain. This practice, commonly known as “block voting,” is precluded by the issuance of one official vote per voting interest. The voice of a single interest will still be heard, but it will be no louder than the voices of every other voting interest, large or small, represented on the committee.

Consideration of Negative Votes

The question of how to handle negative votes submitted by official voters and non-official voters has occasionally caused confusion. Must they all be considered? Does a negative from a non-official voter carry the same weight as a negative from an official voter? The answer to both of these questions is yes. All negative votes, whether submitted by an official voting member or a non-official voting member, must be addressed by the appropriate technical committee in accordance with the *Regulations Governing ASTM Technical Committees* and considered on their technical merits.

When a negative vote is cast by an official or non-official voter and is found

SHOP TALK

persuasive by the relevant technical committee, that negative vote will stop the corresponding ballot item from proceeding through the ballot process and the item will be removed from ballot for further review and consideration.

If a negative vote is cast by an official voter or non-official voter and a motion is put forth to find the negative not-persuasive or not-related by the relevant technical subcommittee, only the official voting members may participate in the determining vote. However, a non-official voter may actively participate in the discussion surrounding the motion. The stipulation that limits the consideration of a not persuasive or not related negative vote only to official voting members is tied to the issues of balance and voting interest. It serves to ensure the balanced level of representation necessary to resolve the negative vote.

The ASTM consensus process is a century tested method whose goal is to ensure that the standards produced by it are technically sound and responsive to the needs of industry. The concept of one vote per voting interest and its provisions for official and non-official voting status provides the basic ingredients of balanced representation and due process that are critical to the continued achievement of that goal. All voting members, both official and non-official, can take pride in their participation in this process and in their immeasurable value toward its continued success.

Pat A. Picariello

Manager

Technical Committee Operations

Contact: Pat Picariello
Phone: 610/832-9720
e-mail: ppicarie@astm.org