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# Compliance with Principles for the Development of International Standards

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The World Trade Organization's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade attempts to ensure that national regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade. Signed by over 140 countries, the agreement encourages the use of "international standards." Requests for clarification of what is meant by "international standards" has led the WTO to provide clarification, which is contained in G/TBT/1/REV. 8 Section IX.

The Regulations Governing ASTM Technical Committees contains the procedures and requirements for technical committee operation. Included there are requirements for committee formation, the administration of membership and vote assignment, and all aspects of conducting ballots — from the requirements for a valid ballot to the handling of negative votes. The regulations, as well as the electronic tools and outreach that ASTM offers, support ASTM International's compliance with the WTO/TBT principles for international standards.

Following is a list of the TBT Agreement's principles and information on how ASTM International complies with each one.

## Transparency

"All essential information regarding current work programmes, as well as on proposals for standards, guides and recommendations under consideration and on the final results should be made easily accessible." —Through Standards Tracker, a free on-line notification service made available to any interested ASTM member or nonmember, ASTM provides information on newly approved standards, actions on existing standards, and work items. The interested party may request information on all ASTM standards and work items, or select the topical areas or specific standards of interest. Regarding other requirements for transparency, ASTM provides drafts upon request, encourages input from materially affected interests, and generally publishes standards within two months of approval.

## Openness

"Membership of an international standardizing body should be open on a non-discriminatory basis to relevant bodies of at least all WTO Members. This would include openness without discrimination with respect to the participation at the policy development level and at every stage of standards development." — Participation in ASTM International's technical committees and at ASTM's policy level is open on a non-discriminatory basis to individuals and bodies worldwide. Information about standards as they proceed through various stages of development is regularly circulated to all participants. In fact, the Society's Bylaws include "Principles Governing the Procedures for the Development and Adoption of Voluntary Consensus Standards". Included in the principles is the following, "Opportunity for all affected interests to participate in the deliberations, discussions, and decisions concerned both with procedural and substantive matters affecting the proposed standard."



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## Impartiality and Consensus

"All relevant bodies of WTO Members should be provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to the elaboration of an international standard so that the standard development process will not give privilege to, or favor the interests of, a particular supplier/s, country/ies or region/s." — ASTM regulations detail requirements for developing consensus positions through the process for balloting, achieving valid ballots, handling negative votes, and appeals. Impartiality is achieved by assigning a classification to each voter based on the interest the individual represents and ensuring that a balance of voting interests is maintained on committee rosters.

## Effectiveness and Relevance:

"International standards need to be relevant and to effectively respond to regulatory and market needs, as well as scientific and technological developments in various countries. They should not distort the global market, have adverse effects on fair competition, or stifle innovation and technological development ... they should not give preference to the characteristics or requirements of specific countries or regions when different needs or interests exist in other countries and regions." International standards developed through ASTM International are the most frequently cited consensus standards referenced in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations. Over 3,000 ASTM standards are also cited in regulations or used as the basis of national standards of more than 60 countries in every region of the world. Through its regulations, ASTM International requires that technical committees review the standards under their jurisdictions at least every five years; revision is possible any time the technical committee sees a need to reflect technological or market changes. At the same time, ASTM believes that international participation results in high-quality, market-relevant standards and so promotes and seeks out participation by technical experts from all over the world.

## Coherence

"It is important that international standardizing bodies avoid duplication of, or overlap with, the work of other international standardizing bodies." — Annexed to the ASTM regulations is a guide to preparing committee bylaws. Included is the recommended text: "The work of this committee will be coordinated with other ASTM committees and other organizations having mutual interest." ASTM technical committees accomplish such coordination with other committees in ASTM and organizations outside of ASTM in a variety of ways, including sharing common members and establishing formal liaisons and written agreements.

## Development Dimension

"Constraints on developing countries, in particular, to effectively participate in standards development should be taken into consideration in the standards development process." — Through its memorandum of understanding program, ASTM is working with developing countries throughout the world to encourage technical expert participation by offering free, full voting memberships through the signatory national standards body. In fact, the MOUs signed to date have resulted in increased international membership in ASTM.