

European Standards Harmonization

In order to assure access to the European Single Market, Canadian firms should carefully consider the following check-list.

They must:

- keep track of new European technical regulations;
- assess risks and benefits of European standards to their sector;
- undertake to influence the standards setting process to reflect their interests;
- consider the adoption of a registered Quality Assurance Program; and
- push for reciprocal testing arrangements at both the political and industry level.

This advice was just part of the information made available to 150 members of the Canadian business community at the first in a series of seminars on standards and Europe 1992 held last month in Toronto.

The seminar was addressed by Roger Brockway, a member the European Commission Testing and Certification Division.

"A standard is an agreement between people to facilitate trade, to enable people to speak the same language," says Brockway.

The European Community (EC) with its twelve Member States and nine major language groups has to deal with this complex legacy if it wishes to harmonize standards and remove technical barriers to trade at both the intra-EC and extra-EC levels.

These technical barriers consist of three types: technical regulations governing health, safety and the environment; standards, both mandatory and voluntary; and testing and certification.

Technical Regulations

Attempts to harmonize the different Member States' health, safety and environmental regulations proceeded extremely slowly up until the Commission adopted its New Approach, says Brockway.

Under the New Approach, the Commission issues a directive for

a specific product group outlining the minimum essential requirements that products must meet in order to circulate freely in the EC.

Brockway says that at the moment there are directives in the pipeline or already on-stream for: safety of toys, simple pressure vessels, construction products, electromagnetic compatibility, machine safety, personal protective equipment, non-automatic weighing machines, active implantable medical devices, gas appliances and telecom terminals.

Roger Hill, president, Hill Sloan Associates Inc., stressed the importance of Canadian firms checking to see if their products are affected by the new technical directives, assessing the risks and benefits and influencing the standards setting process in their favour whenever possible.

Mandatory and Voluntary Standards

Under the New Approach, the European legislators do not spell out the exact technical requirements necessary to satisfy the directive. They merely list the essential requirements.

The European standards bodies CEN (European Committee on Standardization), CENELEC (European Committee on Electrotechnical Standardization) and ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute) produce solutions which will be recognized as meeting those requirements, says Brockway.

In an effort to harmonize voluntary industrial standards, the Commission's Green Paper on standards is also proposing a single European standards council which would bring European industry together at a European level, says Brockway.

He says this would replace the current system where voluntary standards are worked out at a national level and then there is bargaining at the European level.

Canada already has an umbrella standards organization which attempts to co-ordinate voluntary and mandatory standards: the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

Diane C. Thompson, manager, information division, SCC, explains that, while non-EC countries cannot participate directly in the technical committees of CEN and CENELEC, the SCC can help Canadian business obtain draft European standards for review, provide input into these drafts, purchase published European standards and obtain information on European standards, technical regulations and certification procedures.

Testing and Certification

Brockway acknowledges that the area of testing and certification is the most complex and confused area of the three technical barriers to trade with Europe. He says the European Organization for Testing and Certification (EOTC) will be created to harmonize both mandatory and voluntary procedures.

He expects the EC Commission to have a mandate by mid-1991 to begin discussions with Canada leading to bilateral mutual recognition of testing and certification procedures.

The two elements which would have to be taken into account in such government-to-government negotiations are:

- 1) The commission must be convinced that the non-EC procedures are at least as technically competent as their own.
- 2) A basic balance of interests — there must be an equal treatment of European interests in that sector when they attempt to enter the third country.

In the area of testing for compliance to the mandatory essential requirements, the Commission has established a modular approach whereby increasingly stringent

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