
Types of Technical Barriers

The three main categories of technical barriers to trade are:

- * differences in national regulations governing health, safety and the environment;
- * differences in voluntary industrial standards set by national standards associations like the British Standards Institute (BSI);
- * differences in testing and certification procedures.

All of these have presented challenges to companies attempting to enter the European market.

The European Standards Agenda

Originally the Europeans had hoped to harmonize technical standards across all Member States in the Community but this approach proved too daunting. They have opted for a new approach the main elements of which are:

- * Harmonization of national regulations under the banner of "Essential Requirements," which will set minimum health, safety and environmental standards;
- * Mandatory standards will also be developed for telecommunications, information technology and biotechnology;
- * Detailed standards which satisfy the "Essential Requirements" are being developed by European standards bodies: CEN (European Committee on Standardization), CENELEC (European Committee on Electrotechnical Standardization) and ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute);
- * The principle of "Mutual Recognition" ensures that, where no European standards exist, a product which satisfies the standards of one member country is free to circulate through all countries;
- * As well as the "Essential Requirements," standards are being developed at the sectoral level, specifically in automobiles, food processing and labelling, construction products and information technologies;