

What are International Standards?

The WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) provides that WTO Members recognize the important role that international standards can play in facilitating trade. The Agreement requires among other things that technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures do not create unnecessary barriers to trade, and that WTO Members base their technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures on relevant international standards, unless they would be ineffective or inappropriate.

Although the WTO TBT Agreement does not identify specific international standardizing bodies, the WTO TBT Committee has issued a *Decision of the Committee on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations with relation to Articles 2, 5 and Annex 3 of the Agreement*. These principles are found in Section IX of the *Decisions and Recommendations adopted by the Committee since January 1, 1995*, G/TBT/1/Rev. 8, 23 May 2002. The United States Government as a WTO Member agrees with and supports the Decision, which may be viewed at:

<http://docsonline.wto.org/DDFDocuments/t/G/TBT/1R8.doc>

or in this PDF file:

[WTO Decision](#)

As described in the background and purpose section of the Decision, the Committee “agreed that there was a need to develop principles concerning transparency, openness, impartiality and consensus, relevance and effectiveness, coherence and developing country interests that would clarify and strengthen the concept of international standards under the Agreement and contribute to the advancement of its objectives.” The principles emphasize the need for international standards to be developed with open, impartial and transparent procedures that afford an opportunity for consensus among all interested parties.

In addition, the United States Government and its recent free trade agreement partners have agreed to apply these principles in determining whether an international standard, guide, or recommendation exists within the meaning of the TBT Agreement. All U.S. FTAs may be viewed at:

http://tcc.export.gov/Trade_Agreements/Free_Trade_Agreements/index.asp and

http://www.ustr.gov/Trade_Agreements/Bilateral/Section_Index.html

For further information on this topic, please contact:

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