
Instructions for use of products by consumers

Instructions d'emploi des produits par les consommateurs





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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

Draft Guides adopted by the responsible Committee or Group are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as a Guide requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO/IEC Guide 37 was prepared by the ISO Committee for consumer policy (ISO/COPOLCO).

This third edition cancels and replaces the second edition (ISO/IEC Guide 37:1995), which has been technically revised.

Introduction

Instructions for use are the means of conveying information to the user on how to use products and product-related services in a correct and safe manner. The following are used as means of communication, either separately or in combination:

- texts;
- words;
- graphical symbols;
- diagrams;
- illustrations;
- audible, visible or tactile information.

The instructions for use can be on the product itself or its packaging, or in accompanying materials, e.g. leaflets, manuals, media and computerized information such as the product supplier's website.

While much of the advice in this Guide is equally relevant to instructions for consumer services, it is not intended to cover all aspects of services. See ISO/IEC Guide 76 for further information.

This Guide is not intended to provide comprehensive information covering each case. It offers guidance to all interested parties in the form of general principles and detailed recommendations on the design and formulation of all types of instructions necessary or helpful to the final user of consumer products. Practical recommendations for the assessment of such instructions are included in the informative Annexes A and B.

This Guide can be used in conjunction with the requirements of specific product standards or, where no such standards exist, with the relevant requirements of standards for similar products.

Since the previous edition of this Guide was published, the developments listed below have occurred.

- a) An International Standard for writing instructions (IEC 82079-1) has been published, which provides the possibility for normative references to be made in product standards. However, contrary to physical safety requirements, in practice the effectiveness of the information supplied with a product has hardly ever been subjected to independent verification or certification.
- b) There has been a substantial increase in cross-border movement of both fully-packaged products and of consumers, through migration, tourism, relocation of manufacturing and the opportunities for personal imports provided by the Internet. It can now no longer be assumed by a manufacturer that every consumer can read the official language of the country from which a product was retailed.
- c) It has become recognized that for many products there will be a proportion of older consumers and consumers with disabilities who can use the product safely and independently when given adequate information, but who are unable to gain access to this information in the usual medium in which it is supplied with the product — most often because the size of print that can be accommodated on the product is too small.

This edition of this Guide has been thoroughly revised to take into account both the developments listed above and the many research studies into the effectiveness of product instructions and warning labels, which vary a great deal in the degree to which consumers read, notice and comply with them.

The effectiveness of instructions in preventing harm can never be assumed to be as high as supervised training or designing the product to be fail-safe (when this is possible). The aim of this Guide is to help convey necessary knowledge to the end users of consumer products, and to facilitate understanding and use of instructions.

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If reliance is placed on just one medium, one phrase or one graphic to communicate a crucial safety message, then some proportion of consumers will not receive that message and another proportion will fail to recall it at the crucial moment.