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## GUIDE 74

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### **Graphical symbols — Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers' needs**

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## Foreword

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ISO/IEC Guide 74 was prepared jointly by the ISO *Committee on consumer policy* (COPOLCO), and Technical Committee ISO/TC 145, *Graphical symbols*.

## Introduction

Poorly designed and researched graphical symbols, and also the proliferation of graphical symbols with the same intended meaning, can cause confusion for consumers. Such problems will become ever more common in an age of mass travel, mobility of labour, and global trading unless graphical symbols are designed, evaluated and standardized in accordance with procedures set out in the relevant International Standards.

Both the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) have published International Standards that specify the procedures to be followed when producing and standardizing graphical symbols.

Without doubt, graphical symbols can have important benefits in the field of communication, for example,

- they have visual impact,
- they can provide information in a compact form,
- they can provide information in a visual form that is independent of language, and
- they can guide the viewer to a desired outcome or appropriate decision.

However, these benefits are not always achieved in practice and the purpose of this Guide is to ensure that the needs of consumers are adequately addressed when a possible new requirement for a graphical symbol is being considered. If a symbol is to be effective and widely understood, it has to be used frequently, and for the same function. This will help create familiarity for the user. In the case of graphical symbols used on products or equipment, it will reduce the need for consumers to refer repeatedly to the users' manual. However, there will be instances when optimum results can only be achieved by the provision of supplementary text.

It is important for consumers that graphical symbols should clearly and successfully convey the intended message. In particular, they should differentiate between information that relates to safety requirements (including those associated with unsafe use or the misuse of products and equipment) and those which relate to non-safety information. It is therefore recommended that when technical committees consider the development of graphical symbols intended to convey messages to consumers, they ensure that the relevant groups are involved in the development process. This could be through consumer representation on the committee, through undertaking research on consumer usage, or both.