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Labelling of household appliances

Preface

Symbols/pictograms are tools increasingly used to inform consumers about the use of products. In connection with the information work on household appliances, all the Nordic countries need to be able to make relevant assessments of symbols on household appliances, which should ease the correct use of the products.

The project is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and conducted by the Steering Committee for Product Matters under EK-Konsument.

The following organisations have participated in the project:

The TTS Institute (Work Efficiency Institute) in Finland

SIFO in Norway

Löggildingarstofa (Market Surveillance Authority) in Iceland

The Consumer Agency in Sweden and

The Consumer Agency and the Consumer Council in Denmark.

Status of labelling of household appliances in the Nordic countries

The rules on labelling of household appliances in the Nordic countries are wide. Generally speaking the only labelling required by law is energy labelling/energy declaration and warning labelling.

Energy labelling: in 1992 the EU made a directive on mandatory energy declaration of household appliances, after which CENELEC was authorised to develop test methods which are to be used to determine the values declared. Methods have now been developed for washing machines, automatic dishwashers, tumblers, combined washing/drying machines and ovens.

Energy declarations are controlled by the respective authorities in the Nordic countries. The form of the energy declarations is standardised, and so the consumer has the possibility of comparing products immediately in the buying situation.

Warning labelling: the warning labelling for household appliances is usually laid down in European standards, which ensures a certain degree of uniformity. This labelling is controlled by the

respective authorities in the Nordic countries in connection with the general market control of the safety of electric products.

Instructions: there are no legal requirements for the contents of instructions for household appliances.

There are, however, rules regarding when instructions must be available in the national language.

Denmark: under the marketing law labelling and instructions must be comprehensible and, if there are any safety aspects, they should be written in the national language.

Finland: under Finnish product safety legislation instructions must be written in Finnish and Swedish. If the municipality in which the product is sold is only Finnish-speaking, it is sufficient to write instructions in Finnish.

Iceland: most instructions are available in Scandinavian and English. But there are difficulties having both warning labelling and instructions translated into Icelandic due to the modest size of the market.

Norway: Instructions must be available in a comprehensible language, preferably Norwegian.

Sweden: Instructions must be comprehensible, and the Consumer Agency interprets this to mean that they must be written in Swedish.

Standardisation of graphical symbols

Standardisation of graphical symbols is considered by IEC/TC 3, ISO/TC 145 and ITU (The International Telecommunications Union).

If a new symbol is introduced in a standard, it must be approved by one of the three committees depending on the subject.

Consumer influence in connection with the development of symbols is practically non-existent. In order to achieve influence on the preparation of symbols, it is necessary to participate in the above committees or to participate in the national committees affiliated to the above committees.

The use of symbols on household appliances is not consistent. Often different symbols on different appliances are used for the same function. Many symbols are incomprehensible and cannot stand alone, but necessitate that the consumer consults the instructions to understand the meaning. This was shown by a study made by the Consumer Agency in Sweden in 2002 (see the annex).

Symbols on household appliances are considered by **IEC/TC3 Information structures, documentation and graphical symbols**.

The committee's scope is as follows:

To prepare standards for the electrotechnical and related fields regarding:

1) Methods and rules associated with the human interpretation of information. This refers to:

- Presentation of information in technical documentation,
- Graphical symbols for use in technical documentation,
- Graphical symbols for the human interaction with equipment.

2) Methods and rules associated with the handling of information in computer sensible form. This refers to:

- Information models for the purpose of technical documentation and the exchange of technical information, and the identification of further needs for such models,
- Definition of data element types and data sets for use in information models and technical documentation, and for exchange of technical information.

It includes definition and co-ordination of the information required during the whole life cycle of a device, system, or plant.

The work should be carried out in close co-operation with associated technical committees and international organisations.

IEC/TC3 is composed of three sub-committees (see annex 1)

- **SC 3B** Documentation
- **SC 3C** Graphical symbols for use on equipment
- **SC 3D** Data sets for libraries

The symbols are approved by IEC/TC 3/SC 3, published in an IEC database 60417 which is available on the IEC homepage. A password is required to access the database.

Graphical symbols are also considered in **ISO/TC 145 Graphical symbols**

The scope of ISO/TC 145 is as follows:

Establishing principles for preparation, co-ordination and application of graphical symbols. General responsibility for the review and the co-ordination of those already existing, those under study, and

those to be established. The standardisation of new graphical symbols, when requested by a technical committee, or where it does not fall within the activity of an existing committee.

Excluded: Standardisation of letters, numerals, punctuation marks, mathematical signs and symbols, and symbols for quantities and units. However, such may be used as a component of a graphical symbol.

ISO/TC 145 is composed of the following sub-committees under which there are a number of working groups: (see annex 2)

- **SC 1** Public information symbols
- **SC 2** Safety identification, signs, shapes, symbols and colours
- **SC 3** Graphical symbols for use on equipment

The following working groups are placed on the same footing as the three sub-committees:

- **WG 3** Terminology
- **WG 5** Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers' needs
- **WG 6** Evaluation of test data for graphical symbols (being established)

COPOLCO's role

COPOLCO is a member of ISO/TC 145. In connection with the COPOLCO meeting in Kyoto in 2000 it was decided that COPOLCO in co-operation with ISO/TC 145 and IEC/TC 3/SC 3 should prepare guidelines for design principles and standardisation procedures for graphical symbols with particular emphasis on consumers. This was presented as a new work item in ISO/TC 145 in August 2001 with the following tasks:

- to prepare supplementary information material for design for graphical symbols of particular relevance to consumers' needs and
- to complement existing publications for the standardisation of graphical symbols

The new work item was approved, and the intention was to establish a joint working group (JWG) between ISO/TC 145 and IEC/TC 3/SC 3. IEC/TC 3/SC 3 was not interested in participating in a JWG however, and in November 2001 **ISO/TC 145/WG 5** was established to carry out the work with the participation of COPOLCO. IEC/TC 3/SC 3 has regularly received the documents for commenting.

The working group has prepared a proposal for ISO/IEC Guide 74 Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers needs.

The guide provides information about procedures for the development of graphical symbols and for instance considers the following points:

- Conveying the intended message
- Risk assessment
- Target audience
- Check for existing symbols that convey the same meaning
- Designing a new graphical symbol
- Context of use
- Safety signs and product safety labels
- Public information symbols
- Graphical symbols for use on equipment
- Evaluating the comprehensibility of signs with graphical symbols
- Validation, standardisation and registration of graphical symbols
- Information on registration procedures

The guide refers to the standards relevant to consult when developing new graphical symbols and so should be able to solve problems such as several symbols for the same function and incomprehensible symbols.

The guide was sent out in public consultation in 2002, and the comments received were considered at a meeting in WG 5 in February 2003. The new document has been submitted for translation in AFNOR, after which the guide will be sent out in a new 4 month consultation.

Instructions

Many symbols necessitate that the consumer consults the instructions to understand the meaning. As mentioned above this was shown in a study made by the Consumer Agency in Sweden in 2002 (see the annex). Therefore it is also important that instructions are of such a quality that they can be used even if you have no knowledge of the product. In this connection IEC/TC 3 has prepared a European standard for the preparation of instructions IEC 62079:2001 Preparation of instructions -

Structuring, content and presentation, which has also been approved as a European standard in CEN as EN 62079:2001 Preparation of instructions - Structuring, content and presentation.

In connection with the publication of 62079, IEC/TC 3 has proposed that the ISO/IEC Guide 37 "Instructions for use for products of consumer interest" is withdrawn. COPOLCO has asked for comments on this proposal, and the matter will be discussed at the COPOLCO meeting in September 2003.

CEN/BT WG 124 "Safety of consumers and children - Product information"

Another initiative to improve product information to consumers is the work in CEN/BT WG 124, which on the basis of a mandate from the Commission has prepared a proposal for a CEN report entitled "Product information on goods and services relevant to users".

The scope of the report is as follows:

"This Guide provides standardisation committees with the information necessary to develop product information requirements in as uniform and complete manner as possible. It concentrates on safety information, but contains also other kind of information.

This guide can be consulted where:

- Products are not (yet) covered by standards and/or codes of good practice
- Products are covered by standards without product information requirements
- More in-depth guidance on product information is sought

Manufacturers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, rental companies, technical writers, product designers and other interested parties may find specific guidance on a number of related themes in the documents listed in the normative references"

The report is divided into "purchase information", "instructions for use" and "after sales information" and provides guidance on principles for the development of product information, contents, presentation (e.g. comprehensibility and readability), development of safety sentences and symbols, and tests and evaluation.

Nordic influence

This examination shows that there are ample possibilities for manufacturers to use standardised symbols for many functions of household appliances. And it is also possible to find guidance on the design of instructions and other product information.

But, as shown by the study made by the Consumer Agency in Sweden, there is a tendency that individual manufacturers develop their own version of the symbols. This contributes to confusing consumers and does not increase the comprehensibility. There is no requirement that symbols or instructions must be tested by a consumer panel before they are made available. This means that many symbols and instructions are incomprehensible.

The question is whether we can change this situation in the Nordic countries and how!

The following possibilities may be considered:

Increase knowledge about the existing material

- Improve knowledge on the existing material in national and international standardisation committees
- Examine/assess symbols and product information in connection with the publication of comparative tests in the Nordic consumer magazines
- Invite Nordic manufacturers and importers to an information meeting where the existing material, including the design of instructions, is presented

Influence on standardisation work

- Participate actively in the preparation of symbols in IEC/TC3/SC3
- Establish a consumer panel which can assess symbols before they are approved as standardised symbols
- Participate actively in the standardisation work in the area of household appliances with a view to incorporating requirements for symbols and instructions.

Legislation

- Incorporate requirements for the use of standardised symbols in legislation
- Lay down requirements for the comprehensibility of symbols and instructions in legislation