

S. Joe Bhatia
President and CEO
American National Standards Institute

Opening Remarks
ANSI-HSSP Workshop on Emergency Preparedness for
Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs
February 3, 2009 – Washington, DC
1:00 p.m.

Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Joe Bhatia, and I am president and CEO of the American National Standards Institute.

I am pleased to welcome you to this ANSI Homeland Security Standards Panel Workshop on Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, and to call this meeting to order.

Before we begin today, I would like to introduce Ms. Karen Hughes. Last month, Karen assumed the position of director of ANSI's Homeland Security Standards Panel. She has proven to be a great asset to ANSI in the past as part of the Institute's standards facilitation team, with a focus on program management for U.S. participation in ISO activities. It is my pleasure to have her working with us in this new capacity. Please join me in welcoming her to the homeland security standards community.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the co-leaders of this workshop, who have so generously contributed their time and energy to lead us through this effort over the next two days. Hilary Styron and Allan Fraser, please accept my thanks for all of your hard work.

In early 2003, and in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks, ANSI's Board Officers saw that there was an important role for the voluntary consensus standardization community to play in addressing the nation's critical need for standards and compliance programs. This need was underscored in the National Strategy for Homeland Security. In response, the Homeland Security Standards Panel was formed as a private-public sector collaborative effort.

From the beginning, ANSI-HSSP worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security and, in particular, with Bert Coursey, to address those priority areas that had been identified by DHS as most critical.

The HSSP quickly became recognized as the forum where SDOs, industry, and government representatives could come together to share their knowledge and expertise.

Through annual Plenary sessions and issue-driven workshops like the one we are launching today, Panel members have worked to identify existing standards, determine where there were gaps, and make an action plan to address those gaps in a given priority area.

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From those early days to the present, there has been great interest in the work of the Panel and a very positive response to our call for action. We have worked not only with DHS, but with the 9-11 Commission, the International Organization for Standardization, and a host of others in both the public and private sectors.

Participation in the ANSI-HSSP is open to representatives of industry, government, professional societies, trade associations, standards developers, and consortia groups directly involved in U.S. homeland security standardization.

Many of you here today have been Panel members for a long time now. But I know that we also have a number of new individuals with us today. I look forward to hearing each of your perspectives as we move forward.

Across the country and around the world, standards are working to ensure the safety and well-being of millions of people with disabilities and special needs. From accessibility of buildings and public transportation to ease of use for everyday products and services, many standards-based solutions already exist.

But as we know, there are always gaps to be filled and improvements to be made.

That is why we are here today . . . to examine the current standards landscape and help to assure the safety and well-being of this community in the event of an emergency or a disaster.

This issue has been raised in a number of HSSP workshops and meetings in the past. Because of your demonstrated interest, ANSI – together with the National Organization on Disability Emergency Preparedness Initiative and the NFPA Disability Access Review and Advisory Committee – decided to convene this workshop.

We are kicking off exploration of a truly critical topic. Today, we will be taking a broad view to examine:

- Examples of the evacuation of people with disabilities in recent events;
- The general concepts surround mass evacuations;
- Some specific lessons learned from these recent events; and
- An overview and perspective on the population of people with disabilities.

As always, we rely upon your active participation as subject matter experts. It is your knowledge, your experience, and your contributions that continue to move this effort forward.

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I am confident that the private-public sector partnership that ANSI-HSSP coordinates and facilitates will continue to provide guidance and leadership in this important area.

I look forward to participating in your discussions today as we continue examine the standards and conformity assessment needs for emergency preparedness as it relates to those with special needs.

Many thanks to all of you for coming and for your attention.

I welcome any questions you may have about ANSI and the Homeland Security Standards Panel, and I wish you a very successful and productive meeting.

END