

S. Joe Bhatia President and CEO American National Standards Institute	Congressional Briefing and Expo October 2, 2009 Overview of the U.S. standardization system
--	--

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Joe Bhatia, and I am president and CEO of the American National Standards Institute, often referred to as ANSI. It is my great pleasure to welcome you here to learn a bit more about our nation's standards and conformance system.

The formal U.S. standards system was established more than a century ago to support manufacturing and mechanical processes. From trans-continental rail gauges and pipe threads to steam pressure vessels for ships and locomotives, many products required standardization for our newly modern economy to continue its rapid growth. I encourage you to take a look at a video playing at the ANSI booth. It describes how federal agencies and key private-sector organizations came together to form our organization during that critical juncture in our nation's history.

Today, standards and conformity assessment – or compliance – play an integral role in everyday life, but few people stop to think about their tremendous impact. There are as many different kinds of standards and accompanying compliance activities as there are different industries, products, services. For example, when we're talking about compliance, we could be thinking of a legal requirement set down by a federal agency or a state or local entity; or we could be thinking of private-sector marketplace criteria.

At the simplest level, if you have screwed in a light bulb, withdrawn cash from an ATM, or filled your car's gas tank, then you have seen first-hand how standardization works to make our lives safer and more efficient.

Standards and conformance are also effective tools when responding to current national priorities. From healthcare information technology and the smart grid to greenhouse gas and the education and credentialing of the global workforce, ANSI and our Federation of members are working with our government partners to develop interoperable and consensus-based solutions that meet these needs.

For those of you who don't know us, ANSI is a private, non-profit organization that administers and coordinates the U.S. voluntary standards and conformity assessment system. As the voice of this system, we work in close collaboration with stakeholders from both industry and government to identify consensus-based solutions to address national needs and global priorities.

Since its formation, ANSI has held the unique ability of bringing together all the key constituencies – SDOs, certification bodies, government agencies, consumers, industry, and academia – and coordinating the standardization efforts of these diverse interests. In its role as a neutral forum, the Institute has helped to forge and continues to facilitate the robust public-private partnership that now exists in the United States.

ANSI does not develop standards. Rather, we oversee the creation, promulgation, and use of tens of thousands of standards, guidelines, and conformity assessment activities that directly impact businesses and consumers in nearly every industry and product line. ANSI has accredited over 220 bodies that are working to set these standards, including many of the standards developing organizations that are present in this room and are sponsoring this event. Additionally, ANSI has accredited more than 550 conformity assessment bodies offering a broad range of programs . . . from product and personnel certification to quality management, testing and calibration laboratories, and even greenhouse gas verification.

We also speak as the U.S. voice in standardization forums around the globe, including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), ensuring that U.S.-based technologies and experts have a prominent voice on the global standardization stage.

You may be familiar with the term “standards,” but perhaps not “standardization.” When we use this term, we are actually discussing a broad range of activities and ideas – from the actual development of a standard to its promulgation, acceptance and implementation.

Standardization also includes the methods of evaluating whether products, processes, systems, services and personnel comply with a standard – this evaluation is known as conformity assessment, conformance, or compliance. Standards development and assessing conformity to standards go hand-in-hand. Some would say that a standard without compliance is just a good idea.

And often, when problems arise in the global supply chain – whether it’s lead in toys or salmonella in food products – the problem is not the underlying standard. The issue is conformity: the testing, inspection, and audit procedures needed to ensure the safety and quality of the products on our shelves. Our latest brochure – called “Change Is Built on a Foundation of Strength” – is available at the ANSI booth. It gives a number of concrete examples where consensus-based standards and conformity assessment solutions have offered the best and most robust solutions to issues of national significance.

You may be wondering how standards are developed and who makes the decisions. In essence, it is the marketplace that drives the need for standards – a key aspect of our nation’s standards system that makes us unique in the world. In many other nations, a single government agency issues top-down mandates on the

standards and conformance activities that will govern its products, systems, and services. In contrast, the U.S. system is primarily voluntary, private-sector led, and marketplace driven. As a result, we have multiple standards developing organizations in this country, each working in response to a specific marketplace need. In the room today, we have representatives from many of these organizations – called SDOs for short. Because our system is so diverse and sector-based, these SDOs can move quickly to generate standards that are needed by industry and government alike. Similarly, there is a diverse array of conformity assessment bodies – both in the private and public sectors.

All of this information is outlined in a document called the *United States Standards Strategy* – I urge you to pick up a copy before you leave at the ANSI booth. You will see in its pages a recognition that the U.S. standards system is built upon a wide variety of standard setting organizations – from large SDOs who work across a broad range of industry sectors to tightly focused consortia who attend to a particular product or service. Together, these organizations make up one of the world’s most reliable and responsive national standards systems. Rather than mandating a “one-size fits all” solution, our system allows players to find the tools and solutions that best fit their needs – whether we are talking about regulatory issues or marketplace demands.

Our nation has a strong, flexible, vibrant standards system that is devoted to continuously improving and changing to meet the demands of industry, government and consumers. ANSI is proud to serve as its coordinator and to speak on behalf of the entire standardization community. Ours is a solid and strong foundation based on a long-standing public-private partnership, and it is ready today to help tackle the standardization needs of tomorrow.

Thank you for your attention.