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## **NGOs Move Beyond Politics to Productive Work** *Group Finalizes How-to Guide for TC 207 Involvement, Fact Sheet* **By Pam Parry, Contributor**

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa—Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international delegates moved beyond the politics surrounding the formation of the NGO Task Group and finalized two documents at the June plenary of ISO Technical Committee 207 (TC 207).

That was the assessment of Jason Morrison, chairman of the NGO Task Group, which was established in 2000. It met for the first time last year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (See *IESU*, September 2001.) Because of the natural tension among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), industry and the regulatory community, NGO participation in TC 207 has had political overtones, but Morrison said the NGO Task Group moved beyond that barrier in the June 8-16 meeting here.

At the ninth plenary, TC 207 delegates gave the NGO Task Group three specific work goals to fulfill by mid-2003, after which point the group would be disbanded. As a result, the group delivered two documents to the 10<sup>th</sup> plenary, and TC 207 delegates accepted them by approving Resolution 11 during the closing plenary session June 16.

“I have long held that NGOs are the key to acceptance of ISO 14000 standards, and the single most important thing that TC 207 could do to enhance the relevance and credibility of their standards is to engage NGOs in that participation process,” said Morrison, director of the Economic Globalization and the Environment program of the Pacific Institute in Oakland. “And the reason is this: NGOs not only serve as an interface with and help to shape public opinion, but they also are very effective in shaping the way in which standards are used in policy setting and influencing policy in general. The degree to which NGOs think the standards don’t reflect their interests, they will work to either tarnish the image of the standards and/or minimize their use.”

### **Activity in Johannesburg**

In South Africa, about 50 participants and observers representing 12 countries and four liaison groups met over the course of two days to work on the documents. The group’s first work product was a one-page “fact sheet”

(NGO TG N19), and it was virtually finalized before the Johannesburg meeting. The second was a how-to guide for NGO involvement in TC 207 (NGO TG N20), and it was the primary focus of the group's meeting. The fact sheet defines ISO/TC 207 and the purpose, background and membership of the NGO Task Group, including a definition of an NGO as "a nonprofit organization that operates independently of government or business structures and has non-commercial objectives related to environmental, consumer interest or sustainable development."

The fact sheet also outlines the group's work plan, delineating the three work areas based on a TC 207 resolution. Those areas are:

- *Resource impediments:* A subgroup is to research the resource barriers to NGO participation and offer advice on funding approaches to enhance NGO involvement.
- *Structural/procedural limitations:* A subgroup is to develop a paper that analyzes limitations to NGO involvement with TC 207. This paper is one work item that remains on the group's plate, and the NGO Task Group will continue to tackle it over the next year, said Morrison.
- *Interface with the broader NGO community:* A subgroup is to set up "a networking interface to help the NGO community" enhance its dialogue within TC 207. Among the activities of this group was the production of the how-to guide to the ISO process and TC 207 procedures.

### **Warm Reception**

The 11-page how-to guide was a hit among TC 207 delegates, prompting praise from a variety of corners.

"That particular document is valuable to NGOs because it tells the NGOs in very clear, crisp and concise language how the ISO process works," said Joe Cascio, head of the U.S. delegation to ISO TC 207. "And as far as I'm concerned, it's the best thing I've seen that actually does that. That document is not just valuable to the NGOs—it's valuable to anybody who wants to understand how ISO works."

Mary McKiel, standards executive at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington, D.C., said the how-to guide was very well written.

"It is a treasure," said McKiel, vice-chair of the U.S. Technical Advisory Group (U.S. TAG) to TC 207. "It's a little gem, really, and I'm so glad that it's done."

McKiel, who is also one of four vice-chairs of the board of directors of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), said the ANSI officers were

scheduled to meet in late June, and she was excited to tell them about the product.

“It shows that ISO can turn out something that stakeholders want and will help encourage additional stakeholders,” McKiel said.

The document, titled “A Guide for NGO Participation in ISO/TC 207,” has four sections:

1. An introduction;
2. An explanation of the structure and operation of ISO as well as its membership and products;
3. An explanation of ISO/TC 207’s scope, structure, meetings, procedures and languages; and
4. A step-by-step guide to getting involved.

“Each NGO will need to find its own pathway to participation in the standards-setting process,” the guide states. “However, the most common steps or elements will likely include the following:

- Identifying the issues of interest or concern;
- Choosing the mechanism for your participation, either through your national member body or through acquiring liaison status to TC 207;
- Obtaining background documents and other information;
- Participating in TC 207 meetings and other forums.”

“I think it’s an important document,” said Eva Schmincke, a delegate from Germany who has participated in TC 207 since 1993. “It’s not a document for the standardizers; it’s really a document for the participants from NGOs that want to know how this works and how they can really achieve something in this business.”

The NGO Task Group arrived in Johannesburg with a draft developed by John Henry, the group’s secretary who is with Standards Australia in Sydney. Morrison said that draft was a good foundation on which to evolve the document. Over the course of one week, the group took that draft and honed in on NGO issues related to participation and hammered out the final document.

Morrison was impressed with the hard work of not just the NGOs but several members of the Chairman’s Advisory Group (CAG), such as Henry and U.S. delegate Dorothy Bowers. Bowers not only helped with the editorial process, but she also made a presentation to the group from the Future Vision Task Force (FVTF).

“It was very illustrative of the fact that the TC 207 leadership is in fact supporting this and that there is a commitment to try to better understand and advance issues related to NGO involvement,” said Morrison. He added that he was heartened by comments made by TC 207 Chairman Daniel Gagnier

during the plenary regarding the value of NGO participation in the technical committee's activities.

"I think this plenary meeting may be the first indication of a shift in the mindset of the TC 207 leadership that they will really make meaningful changes to the way in which this body operates," said Morrison, who acknowledged he might feel uncomfortable recruiting more NGOs unless things have already begun to change in TC 207.

### **New Signals?**

When asked if TC 207 leadership sent signals of a new mindset toward NGOs, McKiel said that "the most important thing is whether NGOs feel that way."

"I don't think we've done anything to the basic ISO process to change the process in order to accommodate the NGOs, because the process already accommodates NGOs," she continued. "But this is the first time that I think we see a technical committee where there are some NGOs that feel that they can make use of that process."

The EPA executive said she used to hear NGOs say that they could not have an effective voice within TC 207 because of the influence and power of industry, but the NGOs involved in TC 207 are working hard in the process, and they are valued in TC 207. About six or seven NGOs participated in the task group's work at the plenary meeting, according to Morrison. There's not many of them, and TC 207 has to work to ensure that whether they come to the meetings NGOs feel comfortable with the standards products in the ISO 14000 series, Bowers said.

"I think this group of NGOs is going to help that, but there's a long way to go," she added.

Bowers, chair of Subcommittee 4 (SC 4) and a co-chair of the FVTF, applauded the guide, noting the group will be working on how TC 207 can reach out to stakeholders as well.

"The reality is that any nongovernment organization has to make choices about how it spends its limited resources," Bowers said. "And so I think it's unrealistic to have an expectation that every NGO group is going to participate in standards setting.

"They simply don't see it as being that important to their mission, and so I think we will continue to see a selective involvement by NGOs who feel that what we're doing is in line with their mission and what they're charged with spending their money on," she said.

Heather McGray was attending her first TC 207 plenary and had similar feelings regarding the importance of NGO involvement. McGray is a project

manager with ECOLOGIA, an NGO based in Middlebury, Vt., that has participated in TC 207 as a liaison organization for several years.

“The things that happen in TC 207 are really important as far as public policy goes, and they have impact on a range of stakeholders all over the world,” McGray said. “So, NGOs are a way of bringing in viewpoints of different people who wouldn’t normally participate in their national standards bodies.”

In Germany and Europe, standardization is a highly political issue, so NGOs are very interested in trying to stake out some influence in the process, said Schmincke. But she said the benefit of participation to NGOs is very indirect, and they need to be translated. In the future, TC 207 will need to better convey the kind of influence NGOs could have, demonstrating their participation is worthwhile in the long run, Schmincke added.

### **What’s Next?**

Over the next year, the NGO Task Group will be working on a paper identifying structural/procedural limitations of NGO participation. Morrison said the group plans to have that document ready for TC 207 approval at next year’s plenary session in Bali, Indonesia, but because of its complexity, it could take a little longer.

“The limitations document addresses the crux of the issue in terms of what hinders NGO participation in this process, and if we can crack those nuts, we will have cracked one of the bigger challenges facing ISO over the next decade of its existence,” Morrison said.

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