

Standards and Codes in International Trade



As part of our broader mandate to create and support conditions that encourage international trade, the [International Trade Administration](#) (ITA) has a laser focus on standards, codes and technical regulations across global markets. Our work continues to support the U.S. government's objectives to reduce or prevent technical barriers to trade, increase global regulatory compatibility and boost U.S. exports.

Naturally, ITA has an interest in the construction sector to help foster a trade environment that can deliver the world's best products, technologies and services to empower local solutions. Internationally, a great deal of attention is given to the sector, as governments, private enterprise, and consumers recognize the impact of the built environment on resource use and environmental outcomes. With buildings estimated to account for some 40 percent of global energy use and a quarter of global water use, achieving a greener, more sustainable built environment today is imperative.

International standards play a crucial role in facilitating trade in technologies, products and services capable of delivering the desired performance outcomes of green building to world markets. In global trade, buyers and sellers thrive on certainty. High-quality, broadly accepted and relevant international standards provide authoritative requirements for materials and products, procedures and testing. They give buyers and suppliers a common language and common technical understanding. Such standards

By Joanne Littlefair, U.S. Dept. of Commerce's International Trade Administration

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are an essential tool for trade, particularly in arenas such as green building, where rapidly evolving technologies and processes can provide new pathways to desired building performance. Using international standards and building codes referencing these standards can deliver the benefits of the consensus expertise reflected in their development, and can offer efficient solutions to common challenges.

GREENER BUILDING CODES

Codes always have been an essential policy tool for managing the safety, security and health environment of buildings. We stand at an interesting point in history with respect to building codes. Today, two forces have elevated the potential of building codes to offset common challenges beyond health and safety protection. First, in an environment where conserving resources and reducing waste is critical for all nations, many U.S. trade partners are changing how they use building codes. Presently, codes often are used as tools for driving increased mandatory building performance. Second, rapidly changing technologies, and the advances they offer, provide new pathways to desired outcomes.

With change comes uncertainty. Therefore, ITA's view is that uncertainty can be transformed into opportunity for buyers and suppliers in global markets if relevant international standards and building codes referencing those standards are used effectively. This view has driven a broad portfolio of ITA work with global partners related to standards and codes for sustainable construction. Current programs committed to addressing common green building challenges use varied approaches to exchange technical and policy information, share industry consensus best practices, showcase existing resources and engage various networks of stakeholders worldwide. The underlying theme across ITA's initiatives is international collaboration, aimed at reducing or preventing technical barriers to trade and increasing global regulatory compatibility to ensure markets are open and buyers have access to the solutions they need.

"The vision of a safe, healthy and efficient built environment to empower citizens is one shared by the United States and trade partners across the globe," notes Marcus Jadotte, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Industry & Analysis, whose division leads ITA's International Standards Team.

"The construction sector, and specifically standards and codes for construction, is an area that is ripe for international exchange and collaboration," Jadotte added.

ITA'S MARKET DEVELOPMENT COOPERATOR PROGRAM AND TOTAL ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

A Market Development Cooperator Program (MDCP) award creates a partnership between ITA and non-profit industry-oriented groups, and includes financial and technical assistance to support well-defined business plans aimed at enhancing U.S. competitiveness within certain industries. Across many sectors, standards and conformity assessment issues often are cited as a significant non-tariff barrier to trade for U.S. companies in foreign markets. Two current ITA MDCP projects specifically relate to standards, building codes and green building.

In 2014, ITA selected standards developer ASTM International to receive an MDCP award geared to advancing standards and codes for sustainable construction in the Gulf Region, with the International Code Council (ICC) serving as the code partner. Both U.S.-based organizations have long-standing commitments to the Gulf Region and a track record of providing relevant solutions to local requirements. Leaders across the Gulf are committed to increasing the sustainability of their construction sectors, and ITA works to ensure the information and best practices shared and resources introduced during the program will help Gulf leaders address their priority challenges in ways that facilitate international trade. The multi-year program, launched in May with a workshop in Qatar, will include conferences, workshops, training and engagement in standards and code

Gulf Officials participate with representatives from ITA, ICC and ASTM International in the Standards and Codes for Sustainable Construction in GCC conference in Doha, Qatar. The event was held on May 6, 2015 and was hosted by GCC Standardization Organization (GSO) and Gulf Organization for Research and Development (GORD) in collaboration with ASTM International, ICC and ITA.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GORD.



development activities.

ASTM International has signed memoranda of understanding (MOU) with all Gulf nations and the Gulf Standardization Organization. ASTM has been cited more than 4,000 times in Gulf-region standards and regulations, including many related to construction. ICC has provided technical support for Gulf nations that have chosen to reference or adopt the *International Codes*. ICC has developed the *International Green Construction Code* (IgCC®), which serves as a model approach to addressing the comprehensive set of challenges inherent in the design, construction and operation of buildings to achieve desired green performance outcomes.

A Gulf region-focused initiative under ITA's Total Economic Engagement (TEE) Program also has addressed standards and codes for sustainable construction. The TEE program provided technical assistance and capacity building to advance a more collaborative and open process designed to foster greater regulatory alignment among Gulf Cooperation Council member states. In March 2014, ITA began the TEE program work on green building standards and codes in the Middle East with an information-sharing conference and policy roundtable in Dubai. Event participants indicated a strong interest in more information on training associated with green code implementation and enforcement, which resulted in a series of ITA-led technical discussions with relevant municipal and planning authorities in September 2015 in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha, Qatar.

With regard to building codes and specifically the plumbing segment, a second ITA MDCP project, undertaken as a result of a 2013 award, has progressed with strong success. Highlights of the program include supporting Indonesia's goal of establishing a plumbing code and related standards, establishing education and training programs for plumbing installers and code enforcement officials in Indonesia, and developing a third-party product testing and certification agency. The code has been developed and the standards work is progressing.

MULTILATERAL WORK IN APEC

ITA's work related to green building standards and codes has brought considerable new information into the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Subcommittee on Standards and Conformance (SCSC). ITA serves as the U.S. government lead for the 2012-2015 SCSC project on standards and green building, which includes a focus on green



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building codes as a tool for increasing building performance. The project involves the 21 APEC-member economies, along with the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It encourages collaboration among economies to ensure the standards and building codes driving green building programs facilitate international trade and do not create unnecessary obstacles. APEC and ASEAN are consensus bodies, and engagement provides an opportunity to exchange technical and policy information, best practices and case studies, as well as good regulatory practices.

Relevant international standards that already exist are highlighted for many building elements and are available to drive solutions. These may be important mechanisms for establishing greener code requirements reflecting consensus technical and procedural solutions to common challenges.

A final element of the project involved looking at the processes and approaches that create a foundation for successful green code usage. The resultant [Green Building Code Infrastructure Guide](#) details best practices in the development, implementation, enforcement and evolution of green building codes. It is publicly available via the [APEC website](#).

Beyond these ITA-led programs, the U.S. government uses multiple approaches to reduce and prevent technical barriers to trade and increase global regulatory alignment. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade Committee is the principal multi-lateral forum for engagement on trade-related standards measures. The Standards Alliance, a USAID-ANSI facility, provides capacity building assistance to developing countries, enabling them to meet their obligations under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. Other arenas include: APEC; ASEAN; regional, multi-lateral and bi-lateral fora; trade partner-specific commercial dialogs; and committees associated with the technical barriers to trade committees of existing U.S. Free Trade Agreements.

Joanne Littlefair is a Senior International Trade Specialist for the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration. For additional information email Littlefair at ITA Office of Materials Industries; Renee Hancher at ITA Office of Standards & Investment Policy; or Naomi Weigler or James Cramer at ITA Office of Middle East & North Africa. **BSJO**



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