



GUIDE 46

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Comparative testing of consumer products and related services — General principles

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Foreword

ISO/IEC Guide 46 has been drawn up by the ISO Council Committee on Consumer Policy (COPOLCO). The document secured the necessary support of the IEC national committees and ISO member bodies, and was subsequently accepted by the IEC Council in May 1985 and by the ISO Council in September 1985.

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Comparative testing of consumer products and related services — General principles

0 Introduction

This Guide sets out general principles for the conduct of comparative testing. These principles are applicable to consumer products, services and a combination of both. They may usefully be followed by bodies and associations which conduct comparative testing programmes. The purpose of this Guide is to enable meaningful test results and information to be presented in a way which will help consumers and others to make an informed choice suitable to their own needs. The products and services under test may be based on a local, national or international market and the characteristics tested may be either very specific or broadly based, provided that the range and limits are clearly stated. (The notes included in the text hereafter offer some but not all the means of applying the principles.)

1 Scope and field of application

This Guide establishes general principles in relation to the conduct of comparative testing of products and services for the information of consumers.

2 General principles

2.1 Choice of products or services

Every reasonable effort should be made to reflect what is available on the market unless the limits of selection are explained.

NOTE — "Reasonable efforts to reflect what is available on the market" could include consulting manufacturers (agents/representatives/importers) or checking current literature and catalogues. It is in the interest of consumers and manufacturers (agents/representatives/importers) that such information should be made available.

2.2 Sampling

The methods used to obtain the sample for testing should preferably be the same as those used by the consumer at normal retail outlets. In all cases, care should be exercised that a selection is made at random and that special samples are not introduced. Attention should be paid to the conditions of sampling, transport and storage before testing.

Precautions should be taken to ensure as far as possible that the results obtained are representative of the product or service offered on the market at the time of sampling.

NOTE — Sampling should ensure as far as possible that the product or service under test is likely to be available when the results are published.

2.3 Choice of characteristics

Except in cases where a survey is made for a particular purpose, all characteristics of a product or service which are important to its use by the consumer should as far as possible be taken into account. Any limitation of choice should be explained.

NOTE — Choice of characteristics may include for example : safety, reliability, durability, performance, energy consumption, environmental effects, running costs, selling prices and maintenance.

3 Test programme

3.1 Test methods

Test methods should as far as possible be standard methods provided by internationally or nationally recognized standards. If these are deemed not to be appropriate or where there is no such standard, care should be taken that the chosen test method is reproducible to the degree necessary to obtain a consistent ranking. Where other than internationally or nationally recognized test methods are used, it would be useful to inform the national standards body for their possible incorporation into a standard.

NOTE — For test methods, attention is drawn to ISO/IEC Guide 36, *Preparation of standard methods of measuring performance (SMMP) of consumer goods*.

3.2 Evaluation of test results

Steps should be taken to minimize errors in testing or results from faulty samples. One way of doing this is to inform the manufacturer (agent/representative/importer) of test results on his own product and to invite his comments in sufficient time before publication. The test results submitted to the manufacturer (agent/representative/importer) should be accompanied by the list of characteristics tested and the test methods used. If the manufacturer (agent/representative/importer) disagrees with the test results, it is recommended that he speedily supplies data to demonstrate that the test results are wrong or exceptional, or that the test methods used were unsuitable. In the case of exceptional results, it may be appropriate to take further samples.

If the tests show that the product or service is dangerous and could put the consumer at unacceptable risk, the manufacturer (agent/representative/importer) and the appropriate authorities should be immediately and simultaneously informed.

3.3 Presentation of test results

Test results should be presented factually in a technically correct manner as well as in terms comprehensible to the consumer. They should enable the consumer to make a choice according to his own particular needs.

In cases where, in spite of verification procedures, major factual errors are found in published reports, corrections should be made at the earliest possible opportunity.

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