

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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GROUP 3(b) - PACKAGING AND LABELLING

Note by the Secretariat on the Work of Other Organizations

1. At its meeting of 7 and 8 May 1974 the Group requested the secretariat to prepare a note on what other organizations were doing in the field of packaging and labelling, including inter alia the composition of these organizations, the status of their work, the results obtained and the extent to which these had actually been applied, distinguishing between the work of governmental and non-governmental organizations and, to the extent possible, the relevance of the work to international trade (MTN/3B/12, paragraph 12).
2. When preparing this paper the secretariat found it necessary to map out the area to be covered.
3. Packages serve different purposes. Goods are packed in commercial packages in the quantities required by direct consumers. These packages are usually designed to prevent damage to the contents. They are sometimes designed to prevent the contents from damaging other things, or to increase the consumer appeal of the product. Packages are made from different materials and take different forms - a pipeline is a package. Goods are also packaged to make up standardized lots which can be conveniently handled and transported. These packages were originally designed to be lifted by hand but more recently have also been designed for mechanical handling, e.g. by palettization and containerization.
4. Labels can also be of different types. In current usage a label means a piece of paper; card, linen, metal etc. which is attached to a product and carries some information about it. In the present context the fact that the label is detachable does not seem an essential feature and labelling has been taken to include marking by which information is applied directly to the product. Information can be conveyed in different ways - by writing, by symbols and in some cases by colour coding (e.g. of electric wiring). The information conveyed by labels or marking can also be of many different types. It can give e.g. the name of the product, the name of the manufacturer, factual details of the product's composition or information about the product's

performance. Labels or marks can also have very specialized purposes. They can show the country of origin of products.¹ They can be registered trade marks. They can show that a product conforms to a certain standard.

5. It is not surprising, therefore, that international organizations deal with packaging and labelling for widely differing reasons.

6. Intergovernmental organizations are concerned, inter alia, with:

- (a) Public safety e.g., the standardization of packaging and labelling of dangerous goods transported internationally.
- (b) Public health e.g. the standardization packaging and labelling of pharmaceuticals.
- (c) Consumer information e.g. informative labelling of textiles.
- (d) Standardization of packaging and labelling of foodstuffs to lay down minimum acceptable levels of quality and hygiene (FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius standards) and sometimes also to establish grades of quality in order to facilitate the marketing of the product (ECE and OECD standards).
- (e) Technical assistance to developing countries in the development of packaging industries.
- (f) Standardization of package sizes to facilitate handling either manually or mechanically, although there has been a tendency to entrust work on this to non-governmental organizations.

7. Non-governmental organizations also deal with many other packaging and labelling problems.

8. This paper is divided into sections corresponding to the categories set out in the two previous paragraphs. It does not go into detail about certain other rather special questions, such as marks of origin, registered trade marks or marks certifying that products conform to certain standards.

¹There is a difference of opinion in the Group as to whether problems relating to marks of origin are covered by its terms of reference (MTN/3B/12, paragraph 2).

Public safety

9. The Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, of the United Nations Economic and Social Council draws up Recommendations relating to the transport of dangerous goods (ST/ECA/81/Rev.2 and Amend. 1), and has published an Illustrated Glossary of Packagings for the Transport of Dangerous Goods (ST/ECA/191, E/CN.2/CONF 5/52). The recommendations have had an influence on a number of international instruments regulating the packaging and labelling of dangerous goods entering into international trade. ECOSOC Resolution 1743 requested the Committee of Experts to continue to investigate the divergencies existing in the modal practices applicable to the transport of dangerous goods and to make recommendations concerning the steps that should be taken with a view to bringing about uniformity in the various modes. Work on this is continuing.
10. In 1965 the Assembly of the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization approved an International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code regulating the transport of dangerous goods by sea. Although the Code has no binding force it had in 1973 been adopted by twenty-six countries owning the greater part of world shipping. Amendments to the Code are considered by the Sub-Committee on the Carriage of Dangerous Goods, a subsidiary organ of the Maritime Safety Committee.
11. The International Air Transport Organization (a non-governmental organization) has drawn up its Restricted Articles Regulations which govern the packaging and labelling of dangerous goods transported by air. They are compulsory for the 109 member companies and are applied by eighty-eight non-member carriers.
12. The International Atomic Energy Agency Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials establish standards of safety which provide an acceptable level of control of the radiation hazards associated with the transport of radioactive material. They contain both packaging and package design provisions, and labelling and marking provisions. The regulations are regularly incorporated both in international rules and in the national law of most countries concerned.
13. The function of the Central Office for International Railway Transport is to operate the International Convention concerning the carriage of goods by rail (CIM). This convention lays down in an annex provisions for the packaging and labelling of dangerous goods. Thirty-two states are parties to the Convention, twenty-six from Europe and six from elsewhere.
14. The Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe has, through its Group of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, drawn up the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) which is in force for fourteen countries (E/ECE/322/Rev.1 and E/ECE/TRANS/503/Rev.1) and a draft European Agreement Concerning the International

Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterway (ADN) (W/TRANS/WP15/350, in preparation). Both contain provisions on packaging and labelling which are based on the provisions of CIM. Changes in these common provisions are considered at joint meetings of the bodies concerned.

Public health

15. The World Health Organization makes its expertise available to other organizations, collaborating for example with the FAO on the Codex Alimentarius Commission (see paragraph 19) and with the IAEA on its Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials (see paragraph 10). It has a number of other activities relating in one way or another to packaging and labelling. Products concerned include pharmaceuticals and pesticides. The WHO code of Good Practices in the manufacture and quality control of drugs contains provisions on packaging and labelling. It has drawn up lists of proposed international non-proprietary names for pharmaceutical substances and is conducting an enquiry into the use made in countries of these, inter alia, for regulatory and labelling purposes. It has also produced a 172 page document entitled "Plastic Containers for Pharmaceuticals - Testing and Control". It has also drawn up a series of standards for pesticides used in public health each of which contains provisions on packaging and labelling (fourth edition, 1973).

16. The Council of Europe has set up a Working Party on Packaging Materials, within the framework of its Public Health Committee, which is classifying substances that may be used in plastic packaging materials coming into contact with foodstuffs according to the toxic potential of the substances. About 250 substances have so far been provisionally classified and a large number of substances are still to be examined. The work is expected to be finished in 1975. Another Working Party of the Public Health Committee has drawn up a booklet on Agricultural Pesticides (3rd edition, 1973) which deals with the labelling of these products, with particular reference to the identification of the product and safety precautions.

Consumer information

17. The Committee on Consumer Policy of the Organization for European Co-operation and Development has published a report on labelling as applied by the member countries of that organization which examines practices in regard to compulsory and voluntary labelling with particular reference to textiles. It will shortly publish a report on compulsory labelling concerning the nature, composition and quality content of prepackaged consumer products with special reference to prepackaged household cleaning products. This report outlines the legal situation in member countries, the principal policy issues confronting member governments and makes a suggestion that member governments consider the adoption of compulsory labelling for prepackaged hazardous consumer products.

Packaging and labelling of foodstuffs

18. Several intergovernmental organizations draw up standards for perishable and prepacked foodstuffs which include packaging and labelling provisions.

19. The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, of which some 100 countries are members, has published about 50 standards on individual products. These always contain provisions on labelling and, as necessary, provisions on packaging and the fill of the container. The text of these standards will be found in the CAC/RS series. These standards have been accepted by a minority of Codex members, mainly developing countries. Details of the acceptance of Codex standards will be found in the report of the Ninth Session of the Commission (ALINORM74/12). The Commission has established a Committee on Food Labelling which comment on the labelling provisions in draft commodity standards and which has drawn up a general standard for the labelling of prepackaged foods (CAC/RS1-1969). The most recent report of the Committee is contained in ALINORM74/22. The Commission has also established a Committee on Food Additives. This Committee also deals with contaminants, which may be caused by packaging, e.g. standards on tinned food lay down maximum levels for tin content and test methods for its determination.

20. The Economic Commission for Europe also works in this area, the body concerned being the Working Party for Standardization of Perishable Foodstuffs of the Committee on Agricultural Problems. The work is based on the Geneva Protocol on Standardization of Fruits and Vegetables (AGRI/WP/1/EURSTAN8 and Rev.1). Standards on almost 50 individual products have been drawn up, each containing a section on packaging and another on marking (AGRI/WP/1/EURSTAN8 and Rev.1). The Economic Commission for Europe is a regional organization but under Article 11 of its rules of procedure other UN members can join in its work on matters of particular concern to them. The ECE standard on apples was, for instance, modified to take into account the characteristics of apples produced outside the region. The Inland Transport Committee of the ECE has also adopted two resolutions on the standardization of packaging for use in the international transport of and trade in certain perishable foodstuffs (Resolution 202 on cardboard packaging and Resolution 203 on wooden packaging, E/ECE/TRANS/550, Adds 1 and 2). Work on the revision of these is continuing (TRANS/WP11/177).

21. Two joint ECE/Codex Groups of Experts have produced nine standards on fruit juices and quick frozen foods, all of which contain provisions on packaging and labelling (CAC/RS series).

22. The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development Scheme for the application of international standards for fruit and vegetables was established in 1962 to ensure a harmonized application of standards drawn up in ECE.

At present sixteen countries (not all members of OECD) apply the scheme for all or some of the 30 odd species included in it. The OECD has also published brochure No. 85 containing recommendations concerning a limited number of size-types of wooden or cardboard packages, presented in the form of standards. The work underway is being pursued to take into account new transport and handling requirements resulting from the use of pallets and containers, and a draft will be submitted in June to governments in the framework of ECE proposing a multi-purpose packaging for fresh fruit and vegetables for use with two types of internationally standardized pallets.

Technical assistance to packaging industries in developing countries

23. Several inter-governmental organizations, including the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT, UNIDO and FAO give technical assistance to packaging industries in developing countries.

24. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT has prepared a provisional two volume study entitled Promoting Packaging for Exporters - A Guide to Institutional Measures and Technical Assistance (ITC/P/34). A revised version of this is at the printers.

Palletization and containerization

25. Several organizations are working on this subject. The United Nations/IMCO Conference on International Container Traffic held in November/December 1972 recommended, inter alia "that the International Organization for Standardization should accelerate its research on interrelated dimensions of containers, pallets, packaging, handling equipment and transport equipment on the basis of modular systems designed for international transport of goods in the interest of all countries" and further recommended to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations that "an ad hoc intergovernmental group be convened, in co-operation with other organizations of the United Nations concerned, as appropriate, at the end of 1975, so as to assess the work done by the International Organization for Standardization and to determine what future action to take in this field, with a view to considering the practicability of eventually drawing up an international agreement on container standards." (Resolution 4 of the Conference, E/CONF59/47, Annex II).

26. The work of the ISO on this subject is described in paragraph 30.

Non-governmental organizations

27. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has sixty members, each of which is the body most representative of standardization in its country. About half of these national standards bodies are governmental bodies, the others

being semi-governmental or non-governmental bodies, most of which receive some form of government subsidy. There are also 15 correspondent members, normally organizations in developing countries which do not have their own national standards bodies.

28. The work of the ISO has concentrated on the publication and formulation of international standards although there is now also a tendency to concentrate on their implementation. International standards are formulated by consensus i.e. all interested parties are consulted, including governments whose views can be taken into account during preparations at the national level if they are not represented on the technical committees themselves. One of the main aims of the work is the promotion of international trade.

29. The work is carried out by some 150 technical committees. The main technical committees dealing with packaging and labelling questions are, TC 38, textiles; TC 52, hermetically sealed metal food containers; TC 73, consumer questions; TC 80, safety colours and signs; TC 122, packaging. The work of these committees is summarized in the Annex. Other technical committees may, however, deal with packaging and labelling problems in the course of their work. For example TC 54, essential oils has established standards for the packaging and labelling of these products.

30. The ISO is accelerating its research on interrelated dimensions of containers, pallets, packaging, handling equipment and transport equipment in line with a recommendation by the UN/IMCO Conference on International Container Traffic. The technical committees concerned are TC 51, pallets, TC 104, freight containers and TC 122, packaging. This work is being co-ordinated by ISO/TD4, distribution of goods. A report will be presented to an inter-governmental meeting, convened by ECOSOC at the end of 1975.

31. The World Packaging Federation, whose Secretariat is currently in Hong Kong, was organized in 1967 as a world forum for exchange of knowledge on packaging. The European Packaging Federation, originally one of the constituent bodies of WPF, has since left that organization. Its members are national packaging centres in some 20 European countries. Its main objectives are co-ordination of its members' activities, standardization (for instance of package sizes), training, support for packaging exhibitions and co-operation with government organizations such as EEC and UNIDO. Other regional organizations, whose aims are similar to those of the European Packaging Federation, are the Asian Packaging Federation, the Latin American Packaging Federation, and the North American Packaging Federation. The creation of an African Packaging Federation is also planned.

32. The International Labelling Centre has its secretariat at the Hague, and was founded in 1966. Its members are organizations in six European countries which are actively engaged in operating or formulating schemes of labelling with an informative content for consumer goods and maintaining the surveillance necessary to ensure the reliability of the statements on their labels. Its aims are to promote international co-operation in the field of informative labelling, to collect and circulate information on labelling schemes of member organizations, to promote the use of identical test methods and uniform labelling schemes, to study the possibilities of achieving an international system of informative labelling and to present the collective views of its member organizations in matters of common interest.

ANNEX

Main ISO Technical Committees Dealing with
Packaging and Labelling

ISO/TC 38 Textiles

(a) Scope:

Standardization of:

fibres, yarns, threads, cords, rope, cloth and other fabricated textile materials; and the methods of tests, terminology and definition relating thereto;

textile industry raw materials, auxiliaries and chemical products required for processing and testing, which are not otherwise covered by existing or future ISO technical committees.

(b) Items to be undertaken in 1974:

Informative labelling of textiles;

Labelling of bed blankets for consumer information.

ISO/TC 52 Hermetically sealed metal food containers

(a) Scope:

Standardization in the field of hermetically sealed food containers normally used for foodstuffs submitted to heat processing, including nomenclature, terminology, designation and inspection, and for each a series of capacities and bottom dimensions.

(b) Published Standards:

ISO/R 90-1959 Hermetically sealed metal food containers

ISO 1361-1972 Hermetically sealed metal food containers - internal diameters of round cans

ISO 2735-1973 Hermetically sealed metal food containers - capacities and diameters of round open-top and vent hole cans for milk.

(c) Items to be undertaken in 1974:

Sizes of fish cans.

Keys and openers.

Association of capacities with diameters for general purpose food cans.

Revision of ISO Recommendation R 90/Hermetically Sealed Metal Food Containers.

Association of capacities with diameters for drinks cans.

Association of capacities with dimensions for non-round meat cans.

(d) Other items:

Relating of various food products to specific can sizes.

ISO/TC 73 Consumer questions

(a) Scope:

Works of standardization in the field of various consumer products, when so entrusted by ISO Council, where no appropriate ISO or IEC Technical Committee exists or is warranted.

The study, in general terms, of various means of assisting consumers and other users through standardization:

- marks indicating conformity with standards
- informative labelling
- comparative tests, etc.

ISO/TC 80 Safety colours and signs

(a) Scope:

Standardization and co-ordination in the field of safety colours and signs including test methods for the colours and, in certain cases, the manner in or device through which the colours and signs should be displayed.

(b) Published Standards:

ISO/R 408-1964 Safety colours

ISO/R 557-1967 Symbols, dimensions and layout for safety signs

(c) Items to be undertaken in 1974:

Revision of ISO/R 408 and ISO/R 557

Establishment of new programme of work.

ISO/TC 122 Packaging

(a) Scope:

Standardization in the field of packaging with regard to terminology and definitions, packaging dimensions, performance requirements and tests.

Excluded: matters falling within the scopes of particular committees (e.g. TC 6,52 and 104).

(b) (i) International Standards published:

Packaging - Complete, Filled Transport Packages

ISO 2206-72 Part I	Identification of parts when testing
ISO 2233-72 Part II	Conditioning for testing
ISO 2234-74 Part III	Stacking test
ISO 2248-72 Part IV	Vertical impact test by dropping
ISO 2244-72 Part V	Horizontal impact test
ISO 2247-72 Part VI	Vibration test
ISO 2872-73 Part VII	Compression test
ISO 2873-73 Part VIII	Low pressure test
ISO 2874-73 Part IX	Stacking test
ISO 2875-73 Part X	Water spray test
ISO 2876-73 Part XI	Rolling test

(ii) Draft International Standards:

DIS 3394 - Dimensions of Rigid Rectangular Packages - Transport Packages.

(c) Items to be undertaken in 1974:

Unit load sizes - Series 1 Freight Containers

Transport Package Dimensions - Unit loads - Series 1 Freight Containers
Package testing

- Guide to the compilation of package performance test schedules for transport packages - part I
- Test schedules for common distribution systems - part II
- Intensiveness of tests - part III
- Criterion of acceptance - part IV
- Test schedules for uncommon distribution systems - part V
- Applications of package performance test schedules - part VI

(d) Other items:

Dimensions of consumer packages