Welcome to the IEC
International Electrotechnical Commission
Fact

Radically transforming manufacturing
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A vital role

Making electrotechnology work... for everyone

Millions of electrical or electronic products and systems in homes, offices, healthcare facilities, factories, public spaces, power generation, transportation, and more, rely on IEC International Standards and the services of the IEC CA (Conformity Assessment) Systems.

The IEC is the world’s leading organization that publishes globally relevant International Standards for all electrical, electronic and related technologies, supports all forms of conformity assessment and administers 3rd party CA Systems.

We coordinate the work of thousands of experts who represent their national stakeholders in the IEC. These experts develop the many technical documents that define testing, interoperability, safety and other essential requirements which are needed by industry and support the growth and advancement of economies.

Designers, manufacturers, testing laboratories, regulators and policy makers depend on IEC work to ensure that devices work safely and efficiently together, anywhere in the world.

More efficient

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The IEC is unique in that it also administers 3rd party CA Systems that assess if components, equipment and systems meet IEC International Standards.

The IEC CA Systems are the largest working multilateral agreements based on one-time testing of products globally. They bring together thousands of testing laboratories which have issued over 1 million certificates that are accepted and used by most countries in the world. With them manufacturers are able to get products much faster and cheaper to many more markets.

Safer

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Governments use IEC International Standards together with conformity assessment to verify the safety and performance of goods that enter a country. This allows them to better protect local populations and the environment.
Key figures

1906
The IEC was founded in 1906.

166
The IEC gathers 166 countries. 83 Members, 83 Affiliate Countries (developing countries who participate free of charge in the IEC Affiliate Country Programme)

15 000
experts from industry, test & research labs, government, academia and consumer groups
> 170 Technical Committees

7 000
International Standards in catalogue

1 million
Conformity Assessment Certificates issued

Fact

Changing the way Standards are developed for increasingly complex systems
The sum of many voices

The IEC provides a global platform where thousands of experts from around the world are able to cooperate to develop the International Standards or conformity assessment services that are needed by industry, regulators and policy makers, testing or research laboratories, academia, investors or insurers.

IEC International Standards represent a global consensus of state-of-the-art knowledge and expertise. They incorporate the needs of stakeholders of all participating countries. Every member country represented through its IEC National Committee has one vote and a say in what goes into an IEC International Standard.

Representing national needs globally

Every IEC National Committee is responsible for selecting experts who will represent the electrotechnical interests of national stakeholders at the global level in the IEC. Together with their peers from other countries they develop thousands of technical documents that define measurement and rating methodologies, as well as interoperability, performance and safety criteria. All of these are needed to enable global trade, increase the efficiency of design, manufacturing, operation, testing and conformity assessment of electrotechnical devices and systems, as well as their end of life recycling and disposal.
Voluntary, consensus based

IEC International Standards are based on the consensus of many experts from different countries around the world. Their adoption and use is always voluntary.

Consensus doesn’t imply that there is a need for unanimity. However, in technical work all scientific or engineering arguments must be taken into account and sustained opposition on all fundamental issues must be overcome.

Once experts have reached agreement, IEC National Committees (one per member country) vote and the resulting International Standard is published by the IEC.

This specific development process makes IEC International Standards unique and gives them broad relevance.
Invisible, indispensable but barely noticed

Modern life is unthinkable without electric energy – it literally transforms lives. Electricity is used to light homes, offices or public spaces. It drives information and communication technology, enables financial and other transactions, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, and much more. Millions of devices require electricity to charge up batteries or simply to plug in to work. Electric energy is so omnipresent that we only notice it when it is absent due to power failures i.e. during storms or natural disasters.

Millions still lack access

Literally hundreds of millions of people still don’t have access to a reliable supply of electricity. The IEC is a partner in the global UN initiative SE4ALL (Sustainable Energy for All) to help address market barriers to universal energy access. We contribute by providing the solid technical foundation that is needed to broadly roll out a multitude of sustainable energy technologies e.g. to expand off-grid power generation or solar lamps.

The whole energy chain

IEC work covers all facets of energy generation, distribution, and use. It includes power generation from fossil fuels such as coal, gas, oil; renewable energy from water, sun, wind and the ocean, but also from nuclear and geothermal sources. The electric energy thus generated is then transmitted through the grid and millions of kilometres of cables and wires to factories, cities, public spaces, buildings, hospitals, transportation, farms, and homes where it is used to drive countless machines, devices and systems that use electricity.

Smart Grid – the key to reliable power in the future

The electric network is highly complex: power consumption and power production need to be continuously balanced. If there is too much consumption or too much production, the network can break down. Power interruptions have a very high economic cost and a very low general acceptance.

With intermittent energy increasingly entering the equation (wind, solar) and many more decentralized production sites, balancing this network is a challenge. To modernize the grid and increase its efficiency, the whole system needs to be reviewed and information technology must be added. Today, the IEC provides the large majority of technical Standards for the Smart Grid and also supports the many technologies that make cities smarter.

A key ingredient of modern life

IEC work provides the foundation that allows industry to build and put in place the components, devices and systems our economies need to function efficiently.

With them we are able to cool and process food, facilitate daily chores such as laundry or cleaning, and study, work or have fun after dark.

Thanks to this work, doctors are able to safely monitor our health, use medical devices to treat our ailments and conduct complex interventions through the night.

Municipalities are able to light public spaces and streets, increasing our safety and well-being.

There is not a single aspect of our lives that is not impacted by electricity, and IEC work helps keep the power on.

Fact

Energy for airports, safety for planes, security for people
Technical rules for global trade

International Standards are technical rules that make it easier to trade products across many countries.

Industry and other stakeholders develop and use International Standards to agree to common solutions for mutual problems. This helps them level the playing field and limit unfair advantages.

Participating in global value chains

Markets are becoming more and more interdependent. Electrical and electronic devices and components represent a large percentage of goods traded globally and they generally transit through many countries before they are assembled and finally consumed. Today, these goods are no longer “made in a country”; they are “made in the world”.

Ultimately all parts that are used to build a product need to fit and work safely together. Harmonized rules such as those incorporated in IEC International Standards allow countries and industries to participate more effectively in these global value chains.
Overcoming barriers to trade

One of the IEC’s principal partners is the WTO (World Trade Organization), whose 160 central government members recognize, through their TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) Agreement that International Standards and conformity assessment play a critical role in improving industrial efficiency and helping to develop world trade.

The IEC is one of the three global organizations (IEC, ISO and ITU) that develop International Standards for the world. The IEC also has cooperation agreements with many regional and international organizations in order to limit duplication and encourage broad use of its work to truly overcome barriers to trade.

Fact

Shipping is crucial to global trade – IEC work is crucial for shipping
Reducing duplication, eliminating waste

Many leading multinationals such as Bosch, Corning, Haier, Hitachi, Philips, Rockwell, Samsung, and hundreds of other big, medium and small organizations throughout the world actively participate in IEC work via their National Committee.

They do so because it helps them reduce duplication, minimize waste of resources and time, and saves them a lot of money on the way.

Clear focus

Active participation provides companies with advance information on technology developments; stimulates and focuses their innovation process; facilitates product design; simplifies testing and certification, and generally helps level the playing field by reducing unfair competition.

Consistent outcomes

Through active participation companies find it easier to build competitive products of consistent safety and quality, protect their intellectual property and disseminate new technologies. In the process they are able to reassure buyers, investors, regulators and insurers.

When companies sit at the table where the technical rules for global trade are written, they are able to influence the future of their industry and make certain that their technologies are taken into account. These companies understand that if they didn’t participate in the process, they would leave it up to competition to write the rules they would have to work with in the future.

Satisfying industry needs

The IEC keeps a close watch on technologies and trends. Every year one or two major technologies are subject to an in-depth analysis by global experts in cooperation with eminent international research establishments. This analysis is published in the form of White Papers and can be downloaded on the IEC website. The aim of these publications is to guide IEC work and pre-empt standardization and conformity assessment needs.

All IEC work is rooted in declared stakeholder needs. Any company or organization anywhere in the world can submit a request for a new IEC International Standard via their IEC National Committee, a Technical Committee an organization in liaison with the IEC or even directly to the IEC General Secretary. Work is started if this need is shared by several other countries around the world, willing to send experts.

Highly cost-efficient

The IEC operates the most cost-efficient platform for electrotechnical standardization in the world and provides an A to Z fully transparent and tightly managed process.
Fact

IEC in manufacturing: increasing efficiency and protecting the safety of man and machine

IEC work also covers

Safety
Interoperability
Electromagnetic compatibility
Terminology & symbols
Environment & waste management
Sustainability & energy efficiency
Electricity is dangerous

Whenever electricity is involved, there is no room for trial and error because every error can be fatal. At every stage, from manufacturing to operation and repair, safety precautions need to be taken around electricity.

Protecting humans and property

IEC work for electrical and mechanical safety helps protect humans, animals and property. In the IEC, some of the world’s top experts develop International Standards for safety that take into account the integrity of installations and systems. The IEC also administers CA (Conformity Assessment) Systems that verify that components and devices comply with these Standards. Together they allow buyers to build customer confidence, and governments to increase public safety.

Reducing liability risks

IEC International Standards are globally recognized as providing the highest guarantee of quality. Using IEC International Standards in the design and manufacturing process of electrical devices provides powerful evidence that a product is reasonably safe and demonstrates that state of the art expertise was applied. This in turn can help reduce liability risks.
Automated safety responses

While absolute safety is an unattainable goal, today there are many areas where the detection of dangerous conditions activates automatic protection mechanisms. For example, the detection of smoke by a sensor will trigger the activation of a water sprinkler system; an overflow-valve will be automatically closed when a certain liquid or pressure level has been reached. There are countless other examples where IEC work helps protect infrastructure, people and the environment.

Safety is central to IEC work

The IEC has a dedicated technical advisory committee on safety (ACOS) which guides and coordinates IEC work in this area. There are also several Technical Committees that write International Standards for safety. They cover topics such as insulation needs for hot surfaces e.g. oven doors, specifying maximum temperature ranges; the safety of toys; the accessibility of moving or electrified parts to little fingers, and much more.
Sustainability

Smarter use of energy

Growing populations and industrializing countries create huge needs for electrical energy, the consumption of which is projected to triple by 2050.

Electricity is the most easily controllable form of energy. It can be produced emission free with renewable methods and it converts energy into useful power with minimal losses or pollution.

Wherever possible, combustion techniques need to be replaced with clean electrical energy technologies to make better use of available raw energy. Today, on average more than 10% of household income in Africa is spent on kerosene for lighting. In the future, smart electrification, for example through solar lamps, will improve the health of millions while reducing emissions and cost.

Energy efficient devices

Industry accounts for approximately 42% of the world’s consumption of electric energy. Two thirds of this is used to power electric motors. Increasing the efficiency levels of those motors by a few percentage points can have a significant impact on energy use, which not only reduces manufacturing costs but also CO₂ emissions.

The IEC has developed a classification system for electrical industrial motors, which is now widely used by manufacturers from around the world. The system has stimulated competition and generated massive technology improvements.

Increasing efficiency through a systems approach

The IEC has laid down the technical foundations for smart electrification and it promotes a systems approach to optimize overall energy efficiency gains. For example, the use of intelligent automation and control systems in buildings or manufacturing can help improve energy efficiency by ensuring that electricity is consumed only when and where necessary.

Reducing energy waste

The need to reduce energy waste through standby power is today widely known and actively addressed both by manufacturers and regulators. It was the IEC that developed the many test methods and processes that underpin the roll-out of the one watt stand-by-energy regulations globally. Similarly, energy rating programmes such as Energy Star implicitly rely on IEC International Standards to control energy consumption of devices such as washing machines, TVs and other equipment.

Many countries around the world use IEC metrics to implement their sustainability programmes.

Environmental and hazardous substances management

The use of hazardous substances in manufacturing is increasingly regulated and highly complex. Noncompliance (even inadvertently) can severely impact corporate reputation and cost substantial sums of money.

IEC work reduces liability risks for manufacturers and improves environmental protection.

Recycling and waste management

End-of-life recycling is important and IEC work in this area is extensive. However, avoiding waste altogether is the ultimate goal. The IEC has standardized the universal charger for mobile phones and notebooks, and is currently working on a similar approach for other devices.

Fact

Reducing the energy consumption of millions of electric motors
Interoperability

Today, buyers and consumers increasingly expect that technical solutions, products and systems from different suppliers are able to interconnect and operate with each other. This reduces operational cost and complexity but also simplifies long-term maintenance because standardized components are easier to find and replace.

IEC International Standards provide “built-in” interoperability that simplifies manufacturing and sourcing.

EMC (Electromagnetic Compatibility)

Do you ever wonder why you are asked to turn off mobile phones and electronic games in an aircraft or hospital? Inherently, all electronic equipment – because of the electricity it uses – generates unwanted radio emissions that can interfere with and disturb the proper functioning of other surrounding devices. That’s why these so-called electromagnetic disturbances must be limited and contained. EMC describes the ability of electronic and electrical systems or components to work correctly when they are close to each other. The IEC is the world’s leading authority in EMC and provides the technical specifications for enclosures, packing materials and other containment and protection measures.
Avoiding misunderstandings

Approximate descriptions are a no-go in engineering. To ensure that every engineer around the world “speaks” the same language, the IEC has standardized terminology for many different technical areas and sometimes whole industries. The wind industry for example uses the terminology that was developed in the IEC to manage expectations of buyers, investors and insurers. Everybody understands what the other is referring to and there is no room for misunderstandings. The IEC has also published Electropedia, a freely accessible online dictionary of electrotechnical terms that are translated into up to 17 languages.

Fact

Ensuring that devices and systems can connect and communicate everywhere
Assessing conformity
Putting standards into practice

Technology is becoming more and more complex. Users and consumers are depending increasingly on products whose design and construction they may not understand. Conformity assessment provides the reassurance they need.

Conformity assessment refers to any activity that determines whether a product, system or service corresponds to the requirements contained in a specification. A specification, often a standard, is a technical description of the characteristics a product, service or object is required to match.

The IEC supports all forms of conformity assessment and is unique in that it also administers four CA (Conformity Assessment) Systems. These Systems bring together thousands of testing laboratories that issue test reports and certificates of conformity for devices, systems, processes and sometimes personnel. They help establish that a product or process is reliable and meets expectations in terms of performance, safety, efficiency, durability and other criteria or that a person has the required competence to conduct installations, maintenance or repairs.

Reducing cost and barriers to trade

IEC International Standards in tandem with conformity assessment help reduce trade barriers caused by different certification criteria in different countries. The IEC CA Systems also help remove significant delays and expense for multiple testing and approval. This allows industry to access more markets faster and at less cost.

Reassuring consumers

Conformity assessment gives consumers the confidence that electrical and electronic products are safe to use and that they will perform as expected.

Global markets - a big step closer

The IEC CA Systems - IECEE, IECEx, IECQ and IECRE - each cover a dedicated segment of electrotechnology. Their ultimate objective is to facilitate global product acceptance, where possible, by means of one test, one certification and, when appropriate, one mark valid in all markets.

Each of the Systems offers CA Schemes based upon IEC International Standards and other specifications when approved by the IEC Conformity Assessment Board.

Fact

Developing the tools and protocols to verify that products deliver what they promise
IECEE – IEC System of Conformity Assessment Schemes for Electrotechnical Equipment and Components

IECEE covers safety, performance and interoperability for a wide variety of equipment and components used in homes, offices, workshops, healthcare facilities, by industry, and others. Nearly 500 independent testing laboratories and several thousand manufacturer’s testing labs from 54 countries participate in the System.

IECEE Certificates are mutually recognized by all Members of the System. A product that has been tested in one member market will generally not have to be retested in another. This greatly facilitates approval and certification at the national level and reduces cost.

IECEE scope

IECEE Members provide conformity assessment services for a wide variety of electrical consumer goods including for example refrigerators, microwaves, lamps, toys, television sets; office equipment such as printers or laptops; electrical and electronic equipment used in medical practice; electric vehicles, factory automation, Smart Grid, and more. IECEE also covers the many components, cables, switches, chargers and batteries that are built into devices. It provides services in electrical energy efficiency and hazardous substance management.

Certificates that open many markets

In many countries, IECEE CB (Certification Body) Test Certificates and Test Reports are proof of compliance to regulatory requirements, and many retailers, buyers and vendors are happy to import electrical goods carrying an IECEE Test Certificate.

No matter where a product has been produced, when it is manufactured to IEC International Standards and tested within the IECEE System, it will uphold a consistently high level of safety. This approach helps reduce delays and the cost of multiple testing and approval since a product or process often needs to be certified only once. The resulting certification can then be accepted by many other countries generally without the need for retesting. In this way products can have access to many more markets.

More information: www.ieee.org

Fact

Protecting the lives of patients and their care givers
Safety in hazardous areas
IECEx – IEC System for Certification to Standards Relating to Equipment for Use in Explosive Atmospheres

IECEx covers all certification needs of the explosive atmosphere industry. The use of equipment, especially electrical and electronic, in explosive environments is highly regulated to ensure that personnel working there but also populations living in the proximity are as safe as possible. IECEx offers a number of Conformity Assessment Schemes which provide the assurance that equipment and systems are manufactured, operated, installed, maintained and repaired according to the highest International Standards of safety.

IECEx scope

Explosive environments are a part of many industries. The best known are oil and gas refineries and processing plants, automotive and aviation refuelling, coal mining and chemical processing plants. However, explosive areas can be found anywhere where flammable gases, liquids or combustive dusts are present. For example in printing, paper and textile industries, grain handling and storage, woodworking areas, sugar refineries, surface coating and paint industries, waste treatment and sewage plants.

Access to safe products everywhere

The United Nations, through UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) endorses IECEx as the world’s best practice model for the verification of conformity to International Standards in Ex areas. It has published a Common Regulatory Framework that encourages countries to use IECEx to facilitate national access to safe devices for Ex environments.

More information: www.iecex.com

All IECEx Certificates are instantly verifiable online or offline via a mobile app.

Fact

Safeguarding explosive areas
Safer, greener electronic components

IECQ – IEC Quality Assessment System for Electronic Components

Electrical and electronic products comprise many, sometimes hundreds of individual components and sub-assemblies. IECQ is a worldwide approval and certification system that covers the supply of electronic components and associated materials and processes. The System allows component suppliers to demonstrate that their products are of consistently high quality. Manufacturers are able to minimize incoming inspection costs and eliminate the need for quality auditing of suppliers.

IECQ scope

The System ensures the safety and reliability of electronic components used in electronics, avionics, car manufacturing, and more. It also monitors and tests the use of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment and provides assessment and certification for facilities that handle unprotected ESD (electrostatic discharge) sensitive devices. With IECQ manufacturers are able to more easily comply with increasingly strict hazardous substances regulations. The avionics and other industries depend on the System to assess suppliers and safely manage their components’ supply chain to avoid counterfeit merchandise.

IECQ covers the following: active and passive components; integrated circuits; electromagnetic, electromechanical, electro-optic components; printed boards; wires and cables.

More information: www.iecq.org
Fact — Making certain that electronics are safe and reliable
Reliability and safety of Renewables

IECRE – IEC System for Certification to Standards Relating to Equipment for Use in Renewable Energy Applications

IECRE has been created in recognition that the ever-increasing demand for electricity and the need to reduce the share of fossil fuels in power generation have led to rapid development and growth of the RE (renewable energy) sector. Intending to provide testing, inspection and certification for sectors such as wind energy, marine energy and solar PV (photovoltaic) energy.

IECRE aims to facilitate international trade in equipment and services for use in Renewable Energy sectors while maintaining the required level of safety.

IECRE scope

In practical terms, the IECRE System is being organized into Sectors and Schemes. Three Sectors have currently been defined:
- Solar PV Energy
- Wind Energy
- Marine Energy

Each of these Sectors intend to operate Schemes that cover:
- Products, e.g. components and systems
- Services, e.g. installations and other related offers of the Sector
- Personnel, e.g. covering the competence of those working in the Sector.

Future potential

While IECRE focuses on these three Sectors for now, the door remains open for consideration of other technologies such as CSP (concentrated solar power), geothermal energy and fuel cells.

More information: www.iecre.org

Fact

Facilitating international trade in Renewable Energy equipment and services
Global reach

Members

All UN-recognized countries can apply for IEC membership. Each IEC Member is represented by an NC (National Committee). The NC coordinates all national interests in electrotechnology, representing local industry, governmental agencies, academia, trade associations, end users and national standard developers within the IEC. Each country is responsible for the structure and set-up of its NC. There are two levels of membership:

**Full Members**

Countries with developed industry and which are able to benefit from full participation in IEC work.

- Are able to participate in all IEC activities, IEC management and technical work
- Have the right to vote and comment on all matters – one vote per country
- Can participate in any TC (Technical Committee) of their choice actively (P-member – vote at all stages and attend all meetings) or as an observer (O-member – vote on Final Draft International Standards)
- Can vote and have full access to all IEC International Standards and documents

Associate Members

Associate membership allows countries with a developed industry but limited financial means to participate actively in IEC work.

- Are able to participate actively in a set number of TCs and IEC activities
- Can vote and comment on a set number of document - one vote per country
- Full access to all IEC International Standards and documents

Fact

Encouraging development in 83 countries
Affiliates

The IEC Affiliate Country Programme encourages developing countries that are in the process of building their infrastructure and industry to participate in IEC work and gives them the opportunity to adopt IEC International Standards without having to become a member. There is no participation fee and the Programme fulfills all requirements of the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement. Benefits are:

- Free of charge, 200 IEC International Standards for national adoption
- Opportunity to comment on documents for 10 selected TCs by e-mail
- Guidance on how to use IEC Conformity Assessment Systems
- Participation in IEC Conformity Assessment Systems
- Participation in IEC General Meetings
- Support in the adoption procedure of IEC International Standards at national level

IEC Affiliate Plus Status

Developing countries who participate in the IEC Affiliate Country Programme and who have adopted at least 50 IEC International Standards and established a NEC (National Electrotechnical Committee) benefit from additional advantages:

- Free of charge, +200 IEC International Standards for national adoption (400 in all)
- Mentoring on a case-by-case basis
IEC structure

IEC International Standards and other products

The products or publications which result from the work of TCs (Technical Committees) and SCs (Subcommittees) fall into two broad categories:

Normative

- International Standards
- Technical Specifications
- Publicly Available Specifications

Informative

- Technical Reports
- Guides

Fact

Supporting the development of new technologies
IEC structure

The Council is the supreme governing body of the IEC. It sets IEC policy, long-term strategy and financial objectives. The Council membership comprises the Presidents of all IEC Full Member NCs (National Committees)—full voting rights; current IEC Officers and IEC Past Presidents as well as the Council Board members.

The Council delegates the management of IEC work to the CB (Council Board). Under the CB, the management of standardization, conformity assessment and market strategy are assumed respectively by the SMB (Standardization Management Board), the CAB (Conformity Assessment Board) and the MSB (Market Strategy Board).

The Executive Committee implements the decisions of the Council and CB. It prepares the agendas and documents for the CB, and supervises the operation of the IEC Central Office as well as communication with NCs (National Committees).

In addition to being responsible for financial matters, the Council elects the IEC Officers, members of the CB, SMB and CAB. It also approves applications for IEC membership as well as amendments to IEC Statutes and Rules of Procedure.

The world’s leading experts

More than 15 000 experts from companies, industry, academia and governments offer their time, knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm to ensure the safety, performance and reliability of products, systems and equipment that use or produce electricity, or contain electronics. Many of these experts enjoy a worldwide reputation in their field.

They understand how equipment should be designed, produced, operated, installed, maintained and Overhauled and introduce that knowledge into IEC International Standards. More than 170 TCs and SCs prepare IEC International Standards from the very small (TC 113: Nanotechnology) to the very big (TC 4: Hydraulic turbines) and everything in between.

IEC International Standards pass through a stringent process for preparation and approval. They can be used with confidence by anyone, anywhere in the world and are considered state-of-the-art by industry and governments.
Please visit the IEC website at www.iec.ch for further information. In the “About the IEC” section, you can contact your local IEC National Committee directly. Alternatively, please contact the IEC Central Office in Geneva, Switzerland or the nearest IEC Regional Centre.

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Fact

Providing the energy and safety protocols for data collection and storage
Fact

The IEC helps keep the power on, everywhere in the world.