

ISO/CASCO works with IAF and ILAC to tackle disreputable practices in conformity assessment industry

A report on practices harmful to the reputation of the conformity assessment industry and proposed actions for tackling them was expected to be finalized by the end of January.

The report was being prepared by the Joint Working Group on the Image and Integrity of Conformity Assessment set up by ISO/CASCO, *Committee on Conformity Assessment*, with the International Accreditation Forum (IAF – www.iaf.nu) and International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC – www.ilac.org).

The JWG, which had its first two meetings in April and November 2001, reported to CASCO, which met in Geneva, Switzerland, on 29-30 November 2001 that it had identified the following types of problem:

1. **Unethical and illegal practices** within conformity assessment bodies, such as the forgery of certificates and test reports.
2. **Bad/unscrupulous practices – although not necessarily illegal ones** – by conformity assessment bodies, such as offering cut-rate

or sub-standard certification, testing and inspection, and providing both consultancy and certification simultaneously.

3. **Misleading advertising** of the status of conformity assessment results, including the misuse of marks of conformity, for example, publicizing ISO 9000 or ISO 14000 certification/registration as if it were a product certification, and using references such as “ISO certified” (Editor’s note – this formulation gives the false impression that it is ISO which has carried out the certification).

Having identified the problem areas, the IAF/ILAC-ISO/CASCO joint working group was to submit a report to CASCO on proposed actions to deal with them.

‘Police yourselves!’

ISO Secretary-General, Dr. Lawrence D. Eicher, in his opening speech to the CASCO meeting, included some remarks that were highly relevant to the concerns and work of the joint working group. He said that ISO 9000 certification bodies and the accreditation bodies that approve them as competent need to do a better job of policing their community to weed out malpractice and dishonest operators.

The ISO Secretary-General said that the conformity assessment community was facing a serious challenge caused by a certain number of certification bodies which acted without integrity.

Although ISO itself does not audit companies and does not issue ISO 9000 certificates nor control the certification bodies that do so

The conformity assessment community is facing a serious challenge caused by a certain number of certification bodies which act without integrity



ISO 9000 News 2-1994



ISO 9000 News 2-1995

A selection of articles and cartoons taken from *ISO 9000 + ISO 14000 News* (the publication which preceded *ISO Management Systems*) over the years, (see also pages 8 and 9) putting the spotlight on some of the darker practices of ‘the ISO 9000 industry’.



independently of ISO, these bodies base their business on ISO standards and guides. "Therefore, when certification bodies act without integrity, many people believe that it is ISO's fault," Dr. Eicher said.

"We regularly receive complaints about certificates being awarded undeservedly to companies who have not been properly audited, or about certification bodies who offer to write the quality manual for the company and then sell them a certificate, or about others who claim to have been approved by ISO. No one at ISO has ever approved such certification bodies."

Dr. Eicher said that ISO was concerned about such practices and that all conformity assessment professionals needed to be concerned too if they wanted to avoid being seen as "charlatans", concluding: "You need to police yourselves."

Growing importance

Welcoming the delegates to the meeting, the ISO Secretary-General noted that it had attracted the participation of more than 100 people from 35 countries and 16 international organizations in liaison with CASCO. This reflected the growing

'When certification bodies act without integrity, many people believe that it is ISO's fault'

Dr. Eicher was interviewed by the French quality magazine, *Qualité références*¹⁾, which asked him for more details on his CASCO declaration. We reproduce below extracts from the interview with the kind permission of *Qualité références*.

Qualité références: You recently called on certification and accreditation bodies "to do a better job of policing their community to weed out malpractice and dishonest operators". Why did you make this declaration?

Dr. Eicher: ISO Central Secretariat receives complaints from members of the public or from companies who have bought a defective product or received poor service from an ISO 9000-certified company. It is not a flood of com-

plaints, it is a flow – but it is a regular one. The people we receive complaints from either believe that it is ISO which has issued the certificate to the company which has upset them, or are convinced that ISO controls the activities of certification bodies, or has approved them. As readers of a specialist magazine like *Qualité références* will be aware, these are misconceptions.

ISO itself does not audit companies and does not issue ISO 9000 certificates nor control the certification bodies that do so independently of ISO. However, these bodies base their business on ISO standards and guides and, therefore, when certification bodies act without integrity, many people believe that it is ISO's fault.

As CEO of our organization, I am concerned about the harm being done to ISO's image through the actions of a certain number of certification bodies who, I believe, are also posing a serious challenge to the entire conformity assessment community.

ISO's Committee on Conformity Assessment (CASCO) comprises ISO members from 86 countries, and 16

international liaison organizations that are concerned with international best practice in certification and accreditation. Therefore, the 17th CASCO meeting in Geneva on 29-30 November 2001 seemed like a good time and place to ask the principal actors of the conformity assessment community to police that community.

Qualité références: Do you have any recommendations to make to companies who wish to undertake a certification programme?

Dr. Eicher: Let me first point out that a company can implement ISO 9000 without seeking certification. The best reason for wanting to implement the standard is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of company operations. If you consult the ISO brochure *ISO 9000 – Selection and Use*, which is available free as a hard copy or accessible on ISO's Web site, then you will see clearly that certification of your management system is certainly not an ISO 9000 requirement.

Deciding to have an independent audit of your system to confirm that it con-

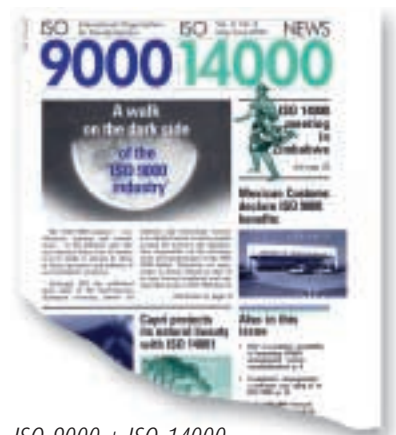
1) *Qualité références*
(Editor in Chief: Martin de Halleux),
SOGI Communication,
103, rue La Fayette.
75481 Paris cedex 10, France.
Tel. + 33 (0)1 42 81 94 00.
Fax + 33 (0)1 42 81 98 07.
E-mail halleux@qualite-references.com
Web www.qualityandco.com

importance of CASCO's work in developing standards and guides that facilitate fair and free international trade. The World Trade Organization has recognized the importance of conformity assessment in its Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement and the WTO/TBT Committee appreciates the contribution of CASCO.

Dr. Eicher encouraged CASCO to continue progressing towards what ISO President Mario Cortopassi had described as his "1-1-1 dream" of one standard, one test and one conformity assessment procedure accepted everywhere.

Standards and guides developed by CASCO for conformity assessment encourage best practice and

consistency when products, services, systems, processes and materials need to be evaluated against standards, regulations or other specifications. "Conformity assessment" is the technical term given to the process of evaluation and approval. An introduction to CASCO and conformity assessment in plain language is posted on ISO's Web site: www.iso.org.



ISO 9000 + ISO 14000
News 3-2000

forms to the standard is a decision to be taken on business grounds: for example, if it is a contractual or regulatory requirement, if it is a market requirement, or to meet customer preferences, if it falls within the context of a risk management programme, or if you think it will motivate your staff by setting a clear goal for your internal quality development.

As far as choosing a certification body is concerned, then company management should go about this with at least the same care as they would in choosing an essential supplier because that is what the certification body is – a supplier of certification services. In fact, you should probably take even more care because the certificate that this supplier will eventually issue you with depends for its value on the good market reputation of the certification body.

I think that most managers will understand that what that means is evaluating several certification bodies, that the cheapest might prove to be the most costly if its auditing is below standard or if its certificate is not recognized by

your customers, that you need to establish whether the certification body has auditors with experience in your business sector, and following the publication of the ISO 9000:2000 series, whether the certification body has really integrated the evolution in the focus of the standards from conformance to performance.

Another point you would want to clarify is whether or not the certification body has been accredited and, if so, by whom. Most of your readers will be aware that accreditation, in simple terms, means that a certification body has been approved as competent to carry out certification in specified business sectors by a national accreditation body.

In most countries, accreditation is a choice, not an obligation and the fact that a certification body is not accredited does not, by itself, mean that it is not a reputable organization. For example, a certification body operating nationally in a highly specific sector might enjoy such a good reputation that it does not feel there is any advantage for it to go to the expense of being



Qualité références
No.15 – Janvier 2002

The ISO Secretary-General expanded on his remarks to CASCO in an interview by the French magazine *Qualité références*

'As CEO of our organization, I am concerned about the harm being done to ISO's image through the actions of a certain number of certification bodies'

accredited. That said, many certification bodies choose to seek accreditation, even when it is not compulsory, in order to be able to demonstrate an independent confirmation of their competence.

These are the main issues to be addressed when your company contemplates certification and decides to seek it.