

ISO vs. MPMA Standard: Questions to Ask Before Adoption

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A common question that MPMA's technical committees face is whether to adopt an ISO standard or to maintain a separate American National Standard (ANS) on the same subject. The answer is rarely straightforward—it depends on the specifics of each case. Some questions to ask include:

Was the U.S. active in the ISO standard's development? If MPMA experts have been actively participating in the ISO working group and have influenced the document, the result is likely to reflect U.S. practice well. If the U.S. had little involvement, or strongly disagreed with positions taken during development, the standard may have gone in directions that don't serve U.S. industry.

Have the standards converged over successive revisions? Much of that depends on the standard's origins. ISO standards rarely start as a blank page—they generally begin from a draft national standard. If an MPMA standard served as the starting point for the ISO work, the differences between the two documents tend to be minor. If another country's standard was the starting point, the resulting ISO document may include assumptions, terminology, or technical approaches that fit that country's industry better than ours.

Will adopting the ISO standard improve trade and market access? When an MPMA standard and an ISO standard cover the same subject but differ in technical requirements, a U.S. company selling internationally may face duplicate design reviews, separate test programs, and parallel documentation—costs that foreign competitors who only deal with one standard do not bear. Adopting the ISO standard as the ANS eliminates that disadvantage and puts U.S. manufacturers on equal footing in global markets.

Is the ISO standard stable, or is it under active revision? Adopting a standard that is about to be significantly revised could mean the committee inherits an outdated document shortly after adoption, triggering immediate follow-on work. If the ISO standard is currently under revision, it may be worth waiting for the new edition before making a decision.

What is the cost to members of switching? If U.S. industry has been using the MPMA standard for many years, products, contracts, regulation, codes, and quality systems may reference it. Adopting the ISO standard could require members to update internal documentation, re-qualify products, or renegotiate contracts—a real cost that should be weighed against the benefits of adoption.

Is the ISO standard widely used? If the ISO standard has become the document that U.S. and global industry relies on



in practice, maintaining a parallel American standard is difficult to justify. Developing and maintaining a standard requires sustained volunteer effort from technical experts who have many other demands on their time. Where global experts have already produced a high-quality ISO standard that industry has embraced, directing MPMA's volunteer resources toward a duplicative effort is hard to defend. Conversely, if U.S. industry is not using the ISO standard or is largely unfamiliar with it, the original American standard is clearly meeting the need and is worth maintaining.

Does adoption serve the members of the association? Adopting the ISO standard makes the international text directly available to U.S. users through familiar channels, with the context and support of the MPMA community. If members would benefit from that access and alignment, adoption serves them well.

Reaching a Decision

After weighing these considerations, a decision is made to provide U.S. industry with the most useful, credible, and technically sound document possible—whether that means embracing the international consensus or preserving the distinctly American one.

