



# It's a Question of standards —but whose?

The area of product safety involves responsibilities across all three levels of government—federal, state and local. At each level, various departments are responsible for different products, such as food, health products and general goods. The ACCC works with the agencies involved in consumer safety to make consumer protection more effective.

The ACCC also deals with:

- supplier organisations including industry and business associations, to reach member companies and deal with their representatives on compliance issues
- technical experts in product design, manufacture and testing
- epidemiologists and other injury prevention specialists
- consumer groups, including special interest user groups, for example, bicycle riders, child safety groups.

More detail on standards development and committee participation can be found on the Standards Australia website: [www.standards.com.au](http://www.standards.com.au)

## How standards are developed

Standards are developed by those directly affected by them. They are drafted by committees comprising designers, manufacturers, safety regulators, testers, technical experts and consumers. This diverse range of participants ensures no single interest or position prevails. The published standard is a consensus of the different viewpoints involved in its development.

Standards Australia is the neutral party in this process and does not play an active part in the decisions of committees. It provides the secretariat and back office services. The committee members are responsible for the standard's technical content which must match the needs and values of our society. Members of standards technical committees must be nominated by representative organisations, such as industry associations.

Most products change over time, through advances in technology, materials and design. They are also influenced by fashion, consumer taste and changes in demand. Standards must keep touch with product changes to ensure they continue to provide for safe use. For this reason they are regularly reviewed.





## How standards are revised and updated

Most mandatory standards are based on published Australian Standards, which Standards Australia regularly reviews. If any significant issue emerges in between revisions, it can be considered outside the usual review process.

As a member of the Standards Australia committees for all relevant mandatory standards under the Trade Practices Act, the ACCC can provide input based on its experience in implementing and enforcing the standards.

Treasury participates in the Standards Australia review process as well. It also regularly reviews all mandatory standards, working closely with the ACCC, and welcomes comments from suppliers and the community.

Suppliers have a responsibility to report any practical difficulties in achieving compliance either through industry representatives or directly to Standards Australia, the ACCC or Treasury. Suppliers of goods covered by mandatory standards are encouraged to check with their industry or trade association that their interests are represented on the relevant Standards Australia committee.

Consumers can contribute to standards development processes as well (see right).

## How to become a consumer rep on Standards Australia committees

It is critical to have consumer input into the development of standards as, ultimately, they exist to protect consumers. Standards Australia encourages consumer input through a project with the Consumers' Federation of Australia, managed by the Consumer Law Centre Victoria.

The Consumers' Federation of Australia nominates consumer representatives to Standards Australia committees that develop standards important to consumers, including product safety standards. Consumer representatives are recruited from the federation's member organisations and from other consumer advocacy groups, organisations and institutions around Australia.

The Consumer Law Centre Victoria employs a part-time standards coordinator to run the project, recruit consumer representatives and help them become involved, and organise their travel to meetings and reimbursement of expenses. For information about the project, including standards committees that currently need consumer reps, and how to become a representative, please contact:

Angela Russell, Consumers' Federation of Australia  
Tel: (03) 9629 6300 (Wed and Thur)  
Email: [angela@clcv.net.au](mailto:angela@clcv.net.au)

# Standards Australia

Standards Australia is an independent, non-government organisation whose primary role is to prepare standards.

A standard is a published document which sets out specifications and procedures to ensure that a material, product, method or service is fit for its purpose and consistently performs the way it was intended. Standards reassure consumers that products purchased will be safe and reliable.

Australian Standards are published as voluntary documents, available for anyone to use, from manufacturers to consumers. They are often used as the basis for regulation, such as the mandatory standards under the Trade Practices Act.

Technical committees prepare the published standards. Their essential characteristic is that membership is balanced and that it represents the broadest possible spectrum of interests.

The ACCC is currently a member of many Standards Australia technical committees including CS/18 for children's toys, CS/86 for children's nightwear having reduced fire hazard, CS/53 for sunglasses and fashion spectacles, CS/75 for child restraint systems for use in motor vehicles and CS/55 for vehicle jacks.

Standards Australia has an excellent website: [www.standards.com.au](http://www.standards.com.au)