

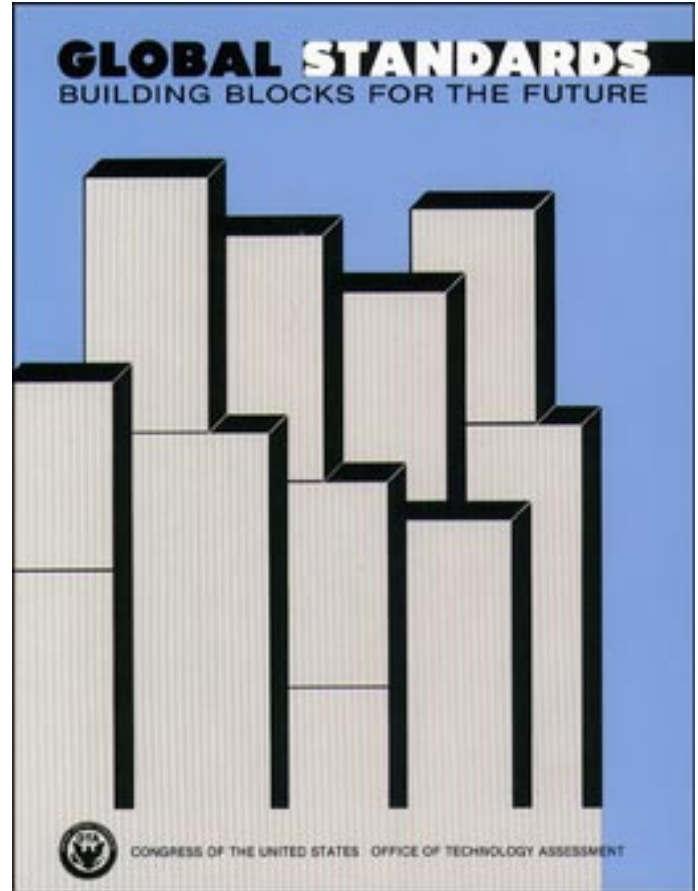
Global Standards: Building Blocks for the Future

March 1992

OTA-TCT-512

NTIS order #PB92-167352

GPO stock #052-003-01277-4



Recommended Citation:

U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Global Standards: Building Blocks for the Future*, TCT-512 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1992).

Foreword

Standards govern the design, operation, manufacture, and use of nearly everything that mankind produces. There are standards to protect the environment and human health and safety, and to mediate commercial transactions. Other standards ensure that different products are compatible when hooked together. There are even standards of acceptable behavior within a society.

Standards generally go unnoticed. They are mostly quiet, unseen forces, such as specifications, regulations, and protocols, that ensure that things work properly, interactively, and responsibly. How standards come about is a mystery to most people should they even ponder the question.

With the evolution of global markets, standards are even more important to facilitate international trade. Unfortunately, they may also be used as trade barriers or to gain advantage over foreign competitors.

The United States has been fortunate to have a pluralistic, industry-led standards setting process that has served us well in the past. Whether it will continue to do so in the future in the face of bruising international economic competition is uncertain.

This study considers the U.S. standards setting process in light of the changing economic and technological environment. Looking across industry sectors, the study compares the U.S. system with those of other countries, particularly the European Economic Community (EEC). Where remedies seem to be warranted, OTA suggests alternative strategies and options that the United States might pursue.

OTA gratefully acknowledges the contribution of those who participated in interviews, reviewed and commented on drafts, and provided information, advice, and assistance. However, OTA bears the sole responsibility for the contents of this report.



JOHN H. GIBBONS
Director

Global Standards: Building Blocks for the Future

OTA Project Staff

John Andelin, *Assistant Director, OTA*
Science, Information, and Natural Resource Division

James Curlin, *Telecommunication and Computing Technologies Program Manager*

Linda Garcia, *Project Director*

Karolyn St. Clair, *Research Assistant*

Other Contributors

Sherry Emery, *Analyst until August, 1991*

John Alic, *Senior Associate, ITE*

Sebastian Remoy, *Research Analyst, ITE*

Alan Davidson, *Summer Intern*

Administrative Staff

Liz Emanuel, *Office Administrator*

Karolyn St. Clair, *PC Specialist*

JoAnne Young, *Secretary*