Expert commentary

BS EN IEC/IEEE 82079-1:2020 — *Preparation of information for use (instructions for use) of products. Part 1: Principles and general requirements*

Gordon Hayward

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1 Overview

In order to use products safely, effectively and efficiently, people depend on information provided by the manufacturer. Even when skilled workers are specifically trained to use a complex product, they are likely to need a comprehensive user manual to refer to occasionally. Confusing product information and inadequate instructions are major sources of frustration for consumers and skilled workers, while defective information can pose a risk of harm or loss, leading to prosecution or to liability claims against the manufacturer, supplier or brand owner.

The standard covers the principles of structure, presentation, content and management processes in the preparation of information for use and specifies generally applicable requirements necessary to ensure that products of any type are provided with information that will enable them to be used effectively by the intended user group.

1.1 Summary

Even the most highly qualified product users are prone to human error, so across all product sectors – industrial or consumer – product instructions, warnings and reference manuals need to be as effective as possible to mitigate the risk of human error – unless a product is truly hazard-free and intuitive.

To address the common challenges faced in optimizing the messages and the media, the 82079 standard series was established as a joint project of IEC and ISO to provide common minimum requirements for the preparation, structuring, content and presentation of instructions and other information required by product users. The first part is the base document intended to make requirements that are common to the preparation of any such communication material – whatever the product – while continuing to allow for more specific or detailed requirements, such as essential content of instructions and precise wording or positioning of warnings being set in standards for individual products – or whole sectoral categories of goods.

1.2 Reasons for change

This revision of Part 1 consolidates the well-established best practices for presentation that were brought together in the first edition (published in 2012 under dual IEC-ISO logos and adopted as an EN), but the sections relating to the practices involved in analysing, designing and testing what is needed to support a particular product have been expanded. This should make practical use of the standard easier for all parties with responsibilities for its practical application: manufacturers, commercial buyers, technical writers, translators and illustrators, safety enforcement authorities, civil courts and human factors advisors.

The material has now been arranged so that conformity with that best practice can be independently evaluated at the two decision points in product development and marketing that are most critical for achieving effective user information:

- Choosing people with the necessary resources and experience to prepare the information
- Verifying – before placing a new product on the market – that the content and presentation of the supporting information will enable the product to be used safely and effectively.

The modification to the title of the standard reflects the use within the document of 'information for use' as a generic term to cover three types of content: conceptual information that the target audience needs to understand, instructional information to be followed or considered and reference information to be consulted when needed. However, 'instructions for use' is accepted as a long-established generic synonym which manufacturers will continue to use – and users continue to expect to see – as the title on the leaflets, booklets and labels accompanying products.

With the participation of IEEE, this revision has been thoroughly updated to cover user information made available in electronic formats, including downloads, and instructions for using software products. Also for the first time additional basic requirements are made for the presentation and evaluation of instructions for products intended for self-assembly by consumers – or professionals who have not received product-specific training.

Additionally, more attention is given to providing alternative access options to a product's information for users with particular needs not met by the minimum acceptable presentational criteria appropriate for the capabilities of the bulk of the target user group.

2 Main commentary

The principles and general requirements for conveying information to users of products that this standard sets are as applicable to complex and safety-critical systems such as an off-shore wind turbine, as they are to simple consumer products such as a can of paint or a child car seat, to software, and to specialized medical testing equipment. They are relevant whenever anyone

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