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Electronic Document Management for the Construction Industry

Standards Australia

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PREFACE

Over the past 20 years the construction industry has moved towards computer support for the production and exchange of information. However, the manual practices and standards for handling construction documentation have not undergone a corresponding change. This is despite the fact that the large number of documents and reference information that are used within the industry are well suited to being handled by electronic document management technologies. The main incentives for change are cost reductions and quality improvements.

Due to the nature of the construction industry, and particularly the nature of many participants' input to a project, it can be extremely difficult to arrive at specific agreements between the different parties and thus promote the importance of documentation standards that are common to the entire industry.

The purpose of this Handbook is to further investigate and describe those standardization needs, and to give guidelines for the electronic management of documents used in the construction industry. It pays particular attention to the transition from manual to computerized processes, and the use of metadata in document exchange.

This Handbook is identical to, and has been reproduced from the ISO Technical Report ISO/TR 19033 *Technical product documentation — Metadata for construction documentation*. ISO/TR 19033 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 10, *Technical drawings, product definition and related documentation*, Subcommittee SC 8, *Construction documentation*.

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Introduction

During the last two decades the construction industry has undergone a thorough transition from manual practice to computer support for the production and exchange of information. However, the manual practices and standards for handling construction documentation have not undergone a corresponding change. Instead, the well-documented manual methods for design cooperation and coordination, a system for process quality assurance common to the industry, are being replaced by procedures specific to projects and companies. The result is that, although every individual participant strives to assure the quality of his or her own products and services, the process may fail to improve overall product quality. In this situation, the information interfaces and networking become key factors.

Nevertheless, electronic document management technologies are well suited to handle the large numbers of documents used in the construction process, together with the associated reference information. Cost reductions and quality improvements are immediate incentives. The potential benefits include:

— efficient search and retrieval of specific documents;

— quick and direct propagation of changes;

— automatic workflow procedures;

— documentation of dependent information in document collections;

— reduced administration through integration of document production and management;

— retrieval of knowledge gained from previous projects and common industry sources.

As document management is by its nature an instrument for the exchange of information, the need for standardization is evident. Specific properties of the construction process, in particular the presence of many participants temporarily involved but over a long period of time, make it extremely difficult to arrive at specific agreements between the different parties and thus promote the importance of standards common to the entire industry. The lack of dominant actors who would be able to set de-facto standards, as well as the ongoing internationalization of the construction industry makes dejure standardization within ISO the natural choice for a successful strategy.

ISO/TC 10/SC 8 has identified metadata for technical documents as being a field where the construction industry would immediately benefit from standardization, and where no standards are presently available. The purpose of this Technical Report is to further investigate and describe those standardization needs, and to propose standardization activities within the ambit of ISO/TC 10/SC 8.

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