COPANT General Assembly, Havana 2014 hosted the

Workshop “Strengthening the Conformity Assessment Infrastructure in the Americas”

The Workshop was organized by the Standards Council of Canada - SCC under the framework of their project Canada-Americas Trade Related Technical Assistance (CATRTA) on April 24 in Havana, Cuba, during the week of COPANT General Assembly.

The Workshop opening remarks were addressed by John Walter, CEO of SCC, who stressed the importance of strengthening the infrastructure and services of conformity assessment in the Americas.

As noted by Alejandro Trujillo, SCC, in his introduction, the workshop aimed at addressing identified challenges when implementing the necessary framework to respond to conformity assessment obligations under the terms of the Technical Barrier to Trade Agreement of the WTO.

We heard some of the practical examples and steps that are required to strengthen the conformity assessment infrastructure within the Americas, including the effective use of accreditation, and the harmonization of conformity assessment procedures through the use of international conformity assessment standards.

Stephen Head from SCC, explained that the TBT agreement recognize the right to ensure “Protection of human safety and health” and ensure the quality of exports and that the Conformity Assessment procedures should not create unnecessary obstacle to trade. There are, however, various mechanism of recognition – whereas the traditional mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) between members can recognize the test results carried out to meet the importing party requirements; or through the use of accreditation by an independent body. Also agreements between Conformity Assessment Bodies can help facilitate trade – such as, the IECEE system that covers more than 1000 IEC standards and 23 product categories.
Panel 1: Best practices on how to coordinate efforts between stakeholders

This Panel was composed by COPANT members from INDECOPI-Peru, Carmela Morgan; from ICONTEC-Colombia, Ricardo Jimenez; from the regional organization for Standards and Quality of CARICOM (CROSQ) Trumel Redmond; and also from SCC-Canada, Chantal Guay; and was moderated by DGN-Mexico, Jesus Lucatero. They shared with us their national quality infrastructure, services, lessons learned when implementing and evolving their conformity assessment framework. They presented their best practices on how to coordinate efforts between stakeholders such as governments, regulators, industries and conformity assessment bodies. We saw interesting case studies to raise awareness of the importance of conformity assessment procedures.

There was interesting examples from Peru and good practices coordinating with stakeholders for conformity assessment procedures for tourism, toys and water; Colombia example was oriented on standards for Trade and Tourism – more specifically those standards that applies to travel agencies making reservations, booking reservations, the rating of hotels and restaurants.

CROSQ with its Caribbean Cooperation for Accreditation Scheme – provides services through several organizations – like in Trinidad & Tobago and in Jamaica. Their focus on sharing information, training, and ensuring qualified personnel are affordable and accessible to all Conformity Assessment Bodies within the region, and are recognized by all the regulators of the member bodies.

Panel 2: Building on regional and international initiatives to enhance cooperation and ensure that conformity assessment services are available to all countries in the hemisphere

We had a second Panel of Regional and International standardization and accreditation organizations. They discussed how to build on regional initiatives to enhance cooperation among Conformity Assessment Bodies to ensure that conformity assessment services are available to all member countries in the region.

We heard from Maria Miranda from IAAC; Kevin McKinley, ISO Deputy Secretary-General; Kerry McManama, Executive Secretary and COO of IECEE that was moderated by Chantal Guay from SCC.

We certainly saw the complexity of the various International and regional bodies and the various practices, tools that exists today to harmonize the application of criteria of the accreditation systems of its members.

The presentation on ISO CASCO toolbox, which was revised, provided a good overview of what is available for each of the participants.
We also understand better the boarder IEC standardization and conformity assessment structure and various activities in the fields of electrotechnology and the related conformity assessment systems.

**Conclusions**

COPANT members identified for our strategic priorities plan 2014-2015 the need to facilitate access to Conformity Assessment services through developing/identifying programs to provide training to COPANT members and promote the use of ISO/CASCO toolbox in the region.

COPANT recently created a Focal Group on Conformity Assessment to create a forum to exchange information and positions to international standards work, and also develop training and hands-on experience/internships. The group had its first meeting just after this Workshop, starting a point for the development of a concrete Action Plan to promote the sharing of practices, and collaborate in the strengthening of the Conformity Assessment services within COPANT members and how COPANT can facilitate access to conformity assessment services in the region.

The next upcoming activity planned by COPANT is the realization of a Workshop in Bogota, Colombia, on May 12-15, address to Standards Head of COPANT members, in the framework of the PTB project, and one of the objectives is to help to create or strength the National Mirror Committees in order to better follow the international standards process and have other benefits such as:

- Ability to propose New Work Items
- Communicate and deploy the use and application of international standards.
- Members need to represent all interested parties in quality infrastructure.

Presentations can be downloaded in the following link.