

**UNECE****United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

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UNECE adopts “Common Regulatory Framework” for equipment used in environments with an explosive atmosphere

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), through its Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, at its recent annual session on 25 November, approved a model for legislation in the sector of “equipment used in environments with an explosive atmosphere”. Such high-risk environments include mines, refineries and chemical plants, as well as offshore facilities and vessels. The equipment used must be sufficiently safe to offer protection to workers, the natural environment and the communities living close by. The UNECE model provides for adequate risk mitigation, and does not create excessive costs or red tape for business.

The model is open to all United Nations member States. Countries that have no “normative framework” in the explosive-equipment sector can use the model as a blueprint for legislation. If countries already have such a framework, they could consider gradually converging towards this international model. Once the model has been adopted as national legislation, the sector will operate under a single common regulatory framework in all participating countries.

Currently, producers and traders often need to repeat costly testing and certification for each of the markets they export to. If they adopt this model, businesses will only need to test and certify their equipment once.

The model covers a large spectrum of products: indeed every appliance to be used in such an environment may need to be certified as safe, depending on the regulations in force. These appliances may be very simple – e.g. light switches or helmets equipped with a light-bulb – or very complex – e.g. telephones, instrumentation measurement systems, or excavators.

The model has a “whole life cycle” approach; it includes installation, production, verification, inspection, maintenance and repair, as well as market surveillance. It also includes procedures for assessing and certifying the competency of personnel.

A first draft of the model was presented at a meeting of regulators and business in Melbourne, Australia, on 2 September 2009. The meeting took place after the annual meeting of the International Electrotechnical Commission system for the certification to standards for electrical equipment for explosive atmospheres (IECEx Scheme). These standards facilitate international trade in equipment and services for use in explosive atmospheres, while at the same time ensuring the required level of safety.

The UNECE model encompasses the IECEx scheme and makes it part of a legislative framework. Within this framework, the IECEx scheme is an acceptable means of establishing

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conformity to standards that are commonly agreed. UNECE encourages countries that do not accept IECEX certificates to base national certification of compliance on IECEX testing and assessments.

The model legislation can be found in Annex I of the document:

http://www.unece.org/trade/wp6/documents/2009/wp6_09_006E.pdf

Note for editors:

The UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies promotes regulatory cooperation in a wide number of sectors. For an overview, please see:

<http://www.unece.org/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/RegulatoryCooperation/RegulatoryCooperation-Brochure.pdf>

For more information on the IECex scheme please see:

www.iecex.com/docs/IECEX_brochureA4LR_Final.pdf