



Every two months, Prof. Dr. Thorsten Arnholt, IECEx Chairman 2014-2019, provides an update on developments within the organisation

Unfortunately, this is the third time I have had to write my column under the context of COVID-19. Worldwide 188 countries have been affected by the pandemic and the impact on mental and physical health has been severe. All 35-member countries of the IECEx Management Committee and organisations, and persons holding IECEx Certification in more than 60 countries continue to struggle with the consequences of the disease.

In addition, the consequences will last much longer than the pandemic itself. Due to the extensive lockdowns between March and June, and the ongoing measures in some countries, there has been significant damage caused to the global economy.

Fortunately, the IEC Conformity Assessment systems are well prepared for such a scenario. Similar to its mother organisation IEC, the Conformity Assessment branch consists of non-profit organisations. It belongs to the basic rules set and controlled by the Board of the Conformity Assessment systems (CAB) which means a major part of its annual surplus has to be piled up to generate a financial reserve for extraordinary circumstances and events. The goal is to keep the systems going for a period of

Smart organisations in emergency mode

time even if there are no external sources of income. The typical worst-case scenario is a deep financial crisis, similar to 2009. For the sake of business continuity, safety and security, it is important that even under such circumstances the Conformity Assessment systems are able to operate.

However, what should be done in the case of a global pandemic, when traveling and even social contacts are prohibited? Money can cure many things, but it is definitely not the appropriate remedy under such circumstances. The IECEx system demonstrated how efficient and effective solutions can be found by flexible and smart organisations. In February 2020 right at the beginning of the crisis, the Executive Secretary issued a new Operational Document, OD 060: "IECEx Guide for Business Continuity – Management of Extraordinary Circumstances or Events Affecting IECEx Certification Schemes and Activities". Knowing that speed was the most critical category in this event, the document was discussed quickly amongst the IECEx Executive. It provides a uniform approach in dealing with the occurrence of "Extraordinary Circumstances or Events" that may impact on the operation of IECEx certification bodies, testing laboratories, and organisations and personnel holding IECEx Certification. The group defined situations that are beyond the control of an organisation, commonly referred to as "Force Majeure" or "Act of God".

All members of the IECEx community quickly adopted the new procedures defined in OD 060 and so the system could maintain its full operability.

Examples are war, strikes, riots, political instability, geopolitical tension, terrorism, crime, pandemics, flooding, earthquakes, malicious computer hacking and other natural or man-made disasters.

For the IECEx peer assessment program, which covers the initial assessment of new applicant Certification Bodies (ExCB) and Test Labs (ExTL) as well as for surveillance and scope extension audits of existing ExCBs and Ex TLs, the following issues should be considered:

- Use of IECEx Assessors located within the same country as the ExCB or ExTL may be accepted based on the Assessors providing a formal declaration of their impartiality for conducting the assessment.
- Use of video communication to replace site visits for the scope extension application for an ExCB provided the Assessors have availability of and ready access to the ExCB's management documentation and procedures in electronic file format and to verify the correct preparation/operation of specific tests.

Similar solutions have been developed for the scheduled QAR initial, surveillance and recertification audits of manufacturers of Ex equipment, for Ex service providers and for Ex certified competent persons. All members of the IECEx community quickly adopted the new procedures defined in OD 060 and so the system could maintain its full operability.

During the May 2020 IECEx online operational meetings and consultation with the IECEx Executive, edition 2.0 of this document was discussed before being issued in July 2020 to provide longer term solutions in the face of continued travel restrictions. This swift action by IECEx further demonstrates how well IECEx is able to serve the needs of industry and regulators. ■