



Every two months, SGS Baseefa Technical Manager Ron Sinclair MBE gives his perspective on the latest developments in the world of standards.

The pandemic goes on and on

When I first wrote about the disruption caused to international standards meetings and IECEx meetings, I thought we would be getting back to normal about now. How wrong I was. Even when I was writing two months ago, we were looking forward to the IEC TC31 meetings to be held across October and November at the UL facility just outside Chicago. These have now been totally cancelled, except that one meeting, the “Chairman’s Advisory Group” will now be held on the same two days in November as planned but, instead of each day being seven or eight hours long and face to face, the agenda will be slimmed so that each of the two days will be a two hour WebEx meeting.

Timing is everything when you have participants from almost every time zone around the world, and it seems that many similar sessions are being restricted to two hours as being a sensible time for maximum concentration and productivity when working remotely.

The various Working Groups, Project Teams (creating new standards) and Maintenance Teams (revising existing standards) will now meet electronically on separate dates and at separate times to suit the participants, although the overall rate of working will have slowed.

Nonetheless, some standards are moving forward towards publication.

There has been a major revision of the basic hazardous area “zoning” standard for gasses and vapours. IEC 60079-10-1. The “Final Draft International Standard” (FDIS) has just been released to National Committees for its formal approval stage, and we look forward to publication in the autumn. It is most unusual for there to be a hiccup in the process at this stage, as all remaining issues should have been resolved at the previous “Committee Draft for Voting” (CDV) stage which, theoretically, is the last chance to get any technical comments considered.

I was not personally involved in the development of this edition, but I am aware that there were some contentious issues that had to be resolved, not least to consider strongly held views from some stakeholders in the UK. With the previous 2015 edition, the EN was published identical to the IEC, so the UK, as a member of Cenelec, was obliged to publish it without alteration, but the BSI committee EXL/31/3 did take the opportunity to write a national foreword, expressing reservations about certain parts of the standard. This list of reservations formed the major input from the UK to the revision process, so we will await with interest to find out if all points were resolved to the UK satisfaction, or if there will need to be a similar national foreword to the new edition.

Another standard to have hit national committees for final acceptance as an FDIS is the new edition of IEC 60079-26. This relates to the use of multiple protection concepts to achieve a level of protection (Equipment Protection Level Ga or Da) which would make it suitable for installation either wholly or partly within Zone 0 or Zone 20.

This new edition of the standard (which was originally written when Ex ia was the only protection deemed suitable for Zone 0) is the first to include consideration of dust protection as well as gas and vapour protection. Although there are certain niche applications of, for example, an Ex eb motor built inside an Ex db carcass to obtain EPL Ga, the principle concern of the standard is relating to equipment which is installed in a boundary wall, for example a motor driving through a shaft into the Zone 0 inside a vessel. Common sense dictates that

a solid wall can act as a boundary between two zones, but this standard goes into great detail about how a non-solid wall, with energy passing through the wall in a shaft, a flexible diaphragm or in wires, can be designed to the relevant level of safety.

The basic principle is simple, EPL Gb plus EPL Gb equals EPL Ga. The problems start when you need to consider possible common failure modes that would render both EPL Gb protections invalid at the same time. This standard helps to resolve those issues.

At European level, the meeting of Cenelec TC 31 scheduled for September has also gone “online”. I am due to retire as chair of this committee and we will be using this meeting (among many other more important things) to elect my successor. The German secretariat has already suggested that it would not be appropriate for my successor to come from the UK, as there would seem to be a preference for someone from an EU country, even though both the CEN-Cenelec management and the BSI management have committed to maintaining the existing relationship between them into the foreseeable future.

This does make some sense, in view of the close ties between the European standards bodies and the European Commission, but it does indicate how already the UK is losing influence over those European Institutions where it will remain a member body after December 31. CEN-Cenelec settled on July 1 this year as the date when the formal status of the UK would transition from an EU member to a non-EU member (with slightly different obligations and privileges). Reassuringly, in the ATEX field, we can certainly look forward to maintaining the same standards as Europe for the foreseeable future. ■

About the author

SGS Baseefa’s Technical Manager Ron Sinclair MBE is a vice-chair of the European Notified Bodies Group for ATEX (ExNBG), as well as Chair of the IECEx Service Facility Certification Committee and a member of the IECEx Executive. He is chair of both the UK and European Standards Bodies operating in this area.