



ON THE ORIGIN OF STANDARDS

Standards are subject to a rigorous development process before spelling out expectations for public safety communications.

By Aimee Jarrell



Imagine you receive a call from a frantic wife who just found her husband unresponsive. You get all the information and realize the emergency is occurring in your radio's area of responsibility. While trying to calm the wife down, you are now also trying to dispatch the appropriate medical units all while relaying pertinent information to responders. In moments like this, every second counts and you must rely on your training and your agency's clearly defined procedures to ensure a successful outcome and accurate response.

That is where standards come in. Without standardized procedures, these high-stakes situations could quickly become chaotic. When it comes to public safety communications, standards are more than just best practices. Standards ensure proper training is given to allow the telecommunicator to perform their duties with confidence, knowing their procedures are reliable and consistent. The standards development process is vital to maintaining public safety at the highest level whether it is addressing new technology or lessons learned from real-world emergencies.

APCO International is an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited standards development organization (SDO). APCO currently has 38 published ANSI-accredited national standards, 21 operational, 6 technical, and 11 training.

ANSI is a nonprofit organization that oversees the development and implementation of voluntary standards. ANSI's role in standards development is to coordinate the creation of standards across a wide range of industries, not just public safety.

ANSI uses a consensus-based approach in standards development, meaning the standard development process seeks input from relevant stakeholders and all other involved parties. At APCO that is broken down into three categories: users, producers and general interest. Under APCO's standards development policies and procedures, users and producers concern themselves with public safety communications equipment, products, processes, systems and services; while general interest includes those whose business or other interests are not covered by another discretely defined interest category.

ANSI also uses balance as a core principle in the standards development process. Balance ensures fairness, transparency and broad acceptance of the standard.

APCO's standards development is run by a staff-led Standards Development Committee (SDC) that is responsible for the development of candidate standards that are to become American National Standards and the approval, maintenance, revision, reaffirmation, adoption and withdrawal of ANS

in the field of public safety communications. Under the main SDC are subcommittees for operations, technical issues and training. The main SDC and all three subcommittees are composed of 15 subject matter experts: five users, five producers and five general interests. Since the subcommittees serve as APCO's consensus bodies, that is where APCO ensures that balance is maintained. Each subcommittee is tasked with bringing new standard ideas to the discussion that will help keep APCO standards relevant and up to date with ever-changing trends in the public safety industry.

HOW THE STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS WORKS

The first step in the standards development process is to identify the need for a new standard, and there is no shortage of new standard ideas in the evolving public safety industry. From NG9-1-1 to comfort animals in an emergency communications center (ECC) to new training needs, there is always something that requires the creation of a new standard. When a subcommittee thinks of a new candidate standard idea, they are also tasked with creating a scope of work and a need for the candidate standard. The proposed scope and need go through a rigorous process requiring approval from both APCO and ANSI.

Once that process is complete, APCO releases a call for participation to solicit volunteers who will make up the working group tasked with creating the candidate ANS. There is no limit to the number of volunteers that a working group can have, and there also is no balance maintained by these working groups, so the group is open to any volunteer who has an interest in the work required, although it is beneficial to have working knowledge about public safety and the candidate standard topic. Once the call for participation is closed, the working group is then created.

Another vital step in the standards development process is research, and this should happen at the beginning stages of the candidate standard creation. It is important that the working group gathers

relevant data, information and best practices related to the topic of the candidate standard through activities such as reviewing existing standards and industry guidelines. This was extremely important in the development of APCO ANS 1.113.2-2024 Public Safety Communications Incident Handling Process when APCO collaborated with the Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University to study call processing and incident handling times at emergency communications centers in the United States. Without this research APCO would not have been able to gather data on how long ECCs take to process different incident types.

After research is conducted, the working group drafts the candidate standard. This step of the process needs to be a collaborative effort, with all members of the working group contributing their expertise to create a comprehensive, practical and technically sound candidate standard.

After the draft is complete and the parent subcommittee of the working group approves the draft, the candidate standard

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moves on to a public review and comment period. This step allows interested parties outside of the working group to provide feedback on the content of the candidate standard. Once this period is over, any comments are sent back to the working group for further discussion and possible revisions. The working group is required to consider all comments that were received during the public review and comment period; there is no exception to this rule.

The final step of the standards development process is approval. Once the candidate

standard has been drafted, approved by the parent sub-committee, sent out for public review and comment, and all comments have been considered, it is time for approval from both APCO and ANSI. It is only after final approval from ANSI that the standard is no longer referred to as a “candidate standard,” and is an official American National Standard.

As mentioned above, APCO offers a wide variety of American National Standards. For instance, if you’re looking to advance your career in public safety, APCO published ANS 1.122.1-2023 Career Progression Within the Public Safety Emergency Communications Center. APCO ANS 3.111.1-2022 covers Detecting Early Warning Symptoms of Stress in Public Safety Telecommunicators. APCO also has training standards for all levels in the communications center staff, from CTO to manager/director to technician and many more. To find a full list of APCO standards please visit www.apcointl.org/standards.

APCO is always active in standards development. If you are interested in volunteering

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for a working group or a subcommittee, reach out to standards@apcointl.org. ●

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development and serves as the staff liaison to the Standards Development Committee, the Operational, Technical, and Training Subcommittees, and Standards working groups.

CDE EXAM #73781

1. What is an American National Standard referred to prior to ANSI approval?
 - a. A draft document
 - b. A candidate standard
 - c. A candidate document
 - d. A draft standard
2. What does SDO stand for?
 - a. Standards Development Office
 - b. Standards Draft Organization
 - c. Standards Development Organization
 - d. Standards Deployment Outlook
3. How many American National Standards has APCO published?
 - a. 11
 - b. 26
 - c. 38
 - d. 47
4. What three categories does APCO use in the standard development process?
 - a. Users, producers, general interest
 - b. Users, technicians, researchers
 - c. Government, industry technicians, general interest
 - d. Writers, designers, implementers
5. What is the role of the working group in the standards development process?
 - a. To draft the candidate standard
 - b. To approve the final version of the standard
 - c. To conduct the public review and comment period
 - d. To monitor the implementation of standards in the field
6. What must be done if comments are received during the public review and comment period?
 - a. Nothing, they can be ignored
 - b. Send them to ANSI for final review
 - c. The working group must consider all the comments that were received
 - d. Move on to final approval
7. What is the definition of a user according to APCO policy and procedure?
 - a. Producer of public safety communications equipment, products, processes, systems, and services
 - b. Those whose business or other interests are not covered by another discretely defined interest category
 - c. User of public safety communications equipment products, processes, systems, and services
 - d. APCO policy and procedure does not define user
8. What is the definition of a producer according to APCO policy and procedure?
 - a. Producer of public safety communications equipment, products, processes, systems, and services
 - b. User of public safety communications equipment products, processes, systems, and services
9. What is the definition of telecommunicator according to APCO policy and procedure?
 - a. User of public safety communications equipment products, processes, systems, and services
 - b. Those whose business or other interests are not covered by another discretely defined interest category
 - c. Producer of public safety communications equipment products, processes, systems, and services
 - d. APCO policy and procedure does not define telecommunicator
10. What are the three subcommittees that fall under the main Standards Development Committee?
 - a. Operations, Technical, Training
 - b. Operational, Technician, Training
 - c. Users, Producers, General Interest
 - d. General, Operations, Training
- c. Those whose business or other interests are not covered by another discretely defined interest category
- d. APCO policy and procedure does not define user

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