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The Life of an ANS Standard

by Patricia Schroeder

As standards administrator for the American Nuclear Society (ANS), I am asked regularly about the status of our standards and find myself explaining the requirements of our accrediting body, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), for why a standard may be classified as a current American National Standard or a historical standard. I recently came across an article written by one of my predecessors that I thought would be beneficial to repeat. The basis for the following article was prepared by Shawn Coyne-Nalbach and was published in the January–February 2001 issue of this newsletter.

How Long Does a Standard “Live”?

An ANSI endorsement grants every standard a five-year life span or approval. Ideally, three to four years into its life, the working group will re-examine the standard to determine if a revision, reaffirmation, or withdrawal is needed by the five-year deadline. This is called the maintenance of a standard. A timely review of the standard gives the committee time to take needed action prior to the five-year anniversary.

If, however, the working group has not completed its maintenance by the fifth year, all is not lost. In this case, a formal request may be submitted to ANSI for an extension. A first extension typically runs for three years. If a revision, reaffirmation, or withdrawal remains uncompleted at the conclusion of the first extension, a second extension is possible for an additional two years—the remaining years until the ten-year deadline.

The Meaning of “Historical Standards”

Ten years is more than enough time to complete maintenance on a standard. Still, for various reasons (defunct working groups, changes in industry needs, loss of a management support, etc.), some standards do reach a ten-year age without completed maintenance. At this time, ANSI “administratively withdraws” the standard because, by policy, no standard can exceed ten years of age. This withdrawn standard is then considered historical.

Whether a standard has been administratively withdrawn by ANSI or balloted for withdrawal by the consensus committee, the standard now moves into a new category. The end of life as a current American National Standard does not equate to termination of existence. The title “historical” indicates that the document has not been maintained according to ANSI and ANS policy. It does not invalidate the work of the working group when it was created. Historical status does not

mean the material is no longer appropriate; it merely means that the material cannot be guaranteed to be current because (in the case of an administrative withdrawal) no one has checked to see if it is current. In the case of a failed reaffirmation ballot, generally speaking, the standard was found no longer up-to-date, so a reaffirmation was not pursued. Should a review of a current standard result in the determination that application of one or more criteria could result in equipment inoperability or a violation of safety or technical specification, a request for a “withdrawal for cause” is submitted to ANSI.

Why Do We Need Historical Standards?

Considering the amount of work required to stay on top of current standards, why would ANS go through the effort of keeping records of its historical standards? Many nuclear plants cite older standards in their specifications and have not updated to newer versions. Because historical standards are part of their documentation, they need to be able to reference and gain copies of the standards. Of course, ANS encourages reference to and use of current versions of our standards, which reflect the work and expertise of our vast group of volunteers. Only use of a current standard guarantees that all changes deemed needed have been incorporated in the technical text.

With historical standards still being used, ANS continues to sell these documents. Sometimes only a photocopy of the original standard is available, but some version is always available. And, with the sale of these documents, ANS continues to accept inquiries on all standards, although the older the standard, the more difficult it becomes to locate the original working group to learn the intent of their written words.

So, while ANS strongly encourages the use of the most current version of a standard, ANS does understand the need for and the value of historical standards. With these documents continuing to be available and to be a part of ANS’s record, one could say that old standards never die; they just become a part of ANS history.