Peer-to-peer

One of the most fundamental rules of work for all conformity assessment systems run by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) is the "peer-to-peer" principle. In our case, it means that the members of our organisations are supervising each other in all important kinds of activities. This also means that there is no need for external independent governmental authorities, such as the ATEX system in Europe. The peer-to-peer system functions well because all partners in our network have an interest in keeping the quality level high since only then will the conformity assessment system be recognised by all its stakeholders.

One of the most important parts of the IECEx system is the assessor function. Assessors are dedicated, competent and experienced experts who are nominated by their National Committees and endorsed by the members of the IECEx Management Committee. Normally, assessors are members or former members of Certification Bodies or Test Labs. Here, IECEx is following the requirements of "ISO/IEC 17040 Conformity Assessment - General requirements for peer assessment of conformity assessment bodies and accreditation bodies".

The task of these experts is the first assessment of new ExCB and ExTL candidates and the regular assessment after defined periods. On the basis of three general ISO/IEC standards and all other relevant operational documents of IECEx, the assessors are evaluating the respective Certification Body or Test Lab to ensure they are fulfilling general and special requirements. The three general ISO/IEC standards are:

• ISO/IEC 17024 Conformity Assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons

• ISO/IEC 17025 – General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories

• ISO/IEC 17065:2012 Conformity Assessment – Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services

The task of these experts is the first assessment of new ExCB and ExTL candidates and the regular assessment after defined periods

A special working group of IECEx is dealing with all relevant issues of assessment and assessors. There are two assessor training workshops per year and there is a permanent exchange of experience organised by the convener of this group.

With the successful development of the schemes for service facilities and personal competencies, new profiles of assessors for these certification activities became necessary. For this reason and due to the extremely high importance of the assessment process inside the IECEx system, the IECEx Management Committee decided to reorganise the assessor's organisation and to lift its importance and relevance inside IECEx to a level close to a subcommittee. The convener of this new IECEx Assessors group and the deputy convener are new members of the Executive Group.

There are now 57 accepted ExCBs and 68 ExTLs for the equipment scheme. The development of new IEC TC 31 standards, like those for non-electric explosion protection, assemblies, optical radiation etc., requires adequate reactions of the assessment process and of the assessor's competence. It is similar for the Certified Service Facility Scheme with its 16 accepted ExCBs and the Certified Personal Competencies Scheme with 15 accepted ExCBs.

At IECEx, the peer-to-peer principle is applied across several levels of the organisation. The IECEx secretary, or one of his colleagues in the Sydney office, checks all the written reports of the assessments. This helps to clarify misunderstandings and solves issues which can occur during the assessments. For two years, there has been a permanent compliance officer in the IECEx organisation. Being a multi-stage peer-to-peer organisation, we can be sure that all members of our global network are fulfilling our high expectations.

In my final year as IECEx chairman, it is very satisfying that during our upcoming annual Management Committee conference in Dubai we have extended our network with two new member countries: Saudi Arabia and Greece. With these, our global family now has 35 members and some new candidates are also knocking at the door. ∎