

Australian Standards now on CD-ROM

**Robyn Beatty explains how this has happened
and what are the benefits**

STANDARDS Australia has become the first national standards body in the world to publish an extensive range of its standards on CD-ROM in a full-text, downloadable format. Not only that, it also aims to publish every single Australian standard in text format on CD-ROM by the end of next year.

There are now over 5000 Australian standards, which in printed form take up an estimated 100,000 pages. When all these standards are published on CD-ROM, they are expected to occupy just two discs.

These will allow quick database searches capturing every instance of a selected word or phrase, resulting in increased confidence in standards use and better use of the standards themselves. Also, users can now easily link standards together electronically and recall those links every time the disc is used. Anybody who has ever tried to read five different standards at once will realise the importance of such a capability. The service includes continuous updates, so that the standards on the CD-ROM are never out of date.

Naturally, not all users need access to all the Australian standards. *Standards on CD-ROM* allows them to pay a subscription according to the number of services selected. The initial subscription provides operating software, a copy of the CD-ROM disc, an electronic lock necessary to access the selected services, a monthly update, and access to Standards Australia's help-desk.

Professional services now available include all building and construction standards, standards referenced in the Building Code of Australia, all quality standards, electrical test specifications, all AUSTEL and related standards, and emergency procedures guides. Also available are safe storage and handling standards, the catalogue of Australian standards, wiring regulations, health and safety standards, conditions of contract, and the architectural practices set.

Supplementary services, which are designed as optional additions to the major services listed above, include mechanical engineering, civil engineering, plumbing standards, concrete standards, and chemicals - materials and testing.

The development program

Standards Australia began its CD-ROM project aware that text capture

would be difficult and costly, since the majority of documents were not available in electronic format. They would either have to be re-keyed from scratch or else scanned page by page, and the scanned image then converted into text format by an 'Optical Character Recognition' (OCR) process. This was seen as a major development program which could take at least a year, and be very costly.

However, the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce helped through the National Procurement Development Project (NPDP), which provides up to 50 percent funding to programs involving a commercial and a government partner. Standards Australia found its partner in Australian Construction Services (ACS), the largest construction consultancy in Australia and a major user of Australian standards.

Development began in October 1989, using local specialist contractors. The development of the 'search engine'—the software which performs the search and retrieve operations—was relatively trouble-free. The data capture program, however, produced problems through the underestimation of the sheer technical complexity of a typical standards-like document, and the need for absolute accuracy. Solving these problems took an additional year, but the results now benefit all Australian standards users who have a PC and an inexpensive CD-ROM drive. ■

Vital Link Updates

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