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New ANSI Standard for the Design of Warnings in Owner's Manuals and Other product Literature

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) will be publishing **ANSI Z535.6 "Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions, and Other Collateral Materials"** in early-to-mid 2006.

Dorris and Associates Inc. (dai) has been active on this committee since its inception and Dr. Nathan Dorris currently serves on the Z535.6 subcommittee, which drafted the new standard.

Safety messages conveyed in owner's manuals, instruction sheets, and similar product accompanying materials are not addressed by existing ANSI standards, despite the assertions of many attorneys and technical witnesses in litigation. ANSI Z535.6 was developed to provide a system for the design of precautionary information in collateral materials. A need for such guidance was identified as more and more manufacturers attempted to translate the design elements of ANSI Z535.4 (on-product warnings) to safety messages in product manuals, which is clearly outside the scope of the Z535.4 standard. The introduction of this new standard outlines this rationale and details some of the inherent differences between safety messages presented in on-product labels (Z535.4) and collateral materials (Z535.6).

The new Z535.6 standard provides a large degree of flexibility in the formatting of safety messages, due to the wide-ranging audience of such a standard. Companies adhering to the ANSI Z535-series range from manufacturers of inexpensive children's toys to multi-million dollar industrial equipment. Additionally, collateral materials vary significantly in their purpose, content and format. This new standard may apply to single-sided instruction sheets for simple consumer products or to a n owner's manual associated with an automobile that is several hundred pages in length.

To achieve the desired level of flexibility in the new standard, a relatively complex framework was established. Nomenclature is introduced to identify new categories of safety messages (i.e., a hierarchy classifying admonishments from general to more specific in nature). Unfortunately, this complexity may generate confusion for individual companies seeking to adopt these new guidelines to their specific circumstances.

For additional information on any of the ANSI Z535-series standards, or to obtain a better understanding of the implications of ANSI Z535.6, please feel free to contact Dr. Nathan Dorris via email at info@dorris-assoc.com.