

International Press Telecommunications Council

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Information Technology for News

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IPTC says ISO code fees are a threat to free exchange of news

Windsor, England, 2 October 2003 -- The International Press Telecommunications Council has strongly protested against proposed royalties to be charged by the International Organization for Standardization (known as ISO) for the commercial use of its widely used codes. Licensing fees for ISO codes that represent languages, countries and currencies are a threat to the free exchange of news, the IPTC said.

In a letter to ISO, the IPTC – the worldwide technical standards organization for the news industry -- says that the fees will have a "severe negative impact" on IPTC's ability to create freely available standards for the exchange of news. The IPTC's standards are the technical backbone for the exchange of news worldwide, and all IPTC standards produced since 1991 rely on ISO codes. The IPTC does not charge for its standards or technical publications; the entire cost is borne by IPTC's members. If ISO goes ahead with its proposed fees, virtually every computer system in the news industry will be liable for royalties.

In mid-September 2003, IPTC learned that ISO intends to charge a fee for the mere use of its letter codes that designate languages, currencies and countries. This includes commonly used country codes in Internet addresses, such as "uk", "jp" and "de"; language codes, such as "en", "fr" and "es"; and currency codes, such as "USD", "EUR" and "JPY". All will be subject to the new charges.

ISO has long earned its revenue by charging membership fees and by selling documents that describe its standard specifications. The actual use of the standardised values is free. ISO's proposed fees will damage the trust that has been placed in the standards process by industries around the world, many of which cannot afford even small fees. The free exchange and processing of standard values for the common good of users in both rich and poor nations has been a bedrock of commerce, science, the news industry and the World Wide Web.

The impact of ISO's proposed fees will be discussed at IPTC's next regular meeting, to be held in Leipzig, Germany, on 8 to 10 October 2003.

The IPTC, based in Windsor, England, is a consortium of the world's major news agencies, news publishers and news industry vendors. It develops and maintains technical standards that are used by virtually every major news organization in the world.

More information may be had from the IPTC at mdirector@iptc.org or <http://www.iptc.org>.

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