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Following the developments in standardization for circular economy at the European level from CEN/CENELEC, we interviewed Dr. Karin Eufinger. From her role as Manager for Standards and Technical Regulations at Centexbel, she participates in the European CEN/TC 473 and the Belgian mirror commission, NBN/I 323. We asked her about the needs for these standards, how they will contribute to economic development and what impact they aim to have.

Why are ISO standards not just simply adopted?

ISO standards are drafted from a broad international context. Thus, they are formulated in a general way, and not finely tuned to the European or national context. To better fit into the local legislative context, it is important to further extend and refine those international standards within that specific context of the legal framework. Think for example of the European Green Deal, the legislation and policies are too specific to be included in ISO standards. At the European and Belgian level, however, those rules can be looked at.

How do standards contribute to a circular economy?

Standards are a means to enable a harmonised approach. The organisations involved provide methods and recommendations. In this way, we also use a common language and it's clear to everyone exactly what is meant by a broad concept such as 'circular economy'.

What are the benefits of those standards?

First of all, we're already facing the scarcity of raw materials in certain sectors. Raw materials are not infinite, so it's important to figure out how we can incorporate surpluses from the production process and discarded products – waste, in other words – back into that production process. The need for this shift in approach is finally being recognised, but there's still a lot to be done before it will be put into practice.

As with other big developments, this will also bring shifts in the labour market. And the impact is significant; just think about the climate, health

indicators and waste. Jobs will change in terms of the tasks they involve, but that evolution will contribute to prosperity.

Do these new standards focus on certain sectors?

No, the approach is much broader than, say, the textiles or plastics industry. The intention is to include everyone in the shift – including consumers. Awareness is starting to emerge in certain sectors, such as the shift from fast to slow fashion, or the rise of the 'right to repair' movement. Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important product feature – but to capture the full cost of the transition, this approach needs to be implemented at every step of the production and distribution process. Only then can we truly produce and consume in a 'cradle to cradle' way.

Has a deadline been set yet?

Right now, we're in the early stages of this technical committee. We're analysing what the approach means in our European context so we can provide a reasoned approach based on practical experience. We're eagerly awaiting the publication of the ISO standards, which will serve as a basis.

So there's still room for additional expert input?

Yes, and in fact, it's the ideal time to get involved. So I'd like to extend a warm invitation to anyone with an interest in the circular economy and to all stakeholders who are implicated one way or another. There are two major advantages to getting involved: you'll be the first to receive all relevant information, plus you can actually help shape standards development. This is of course interesting for companies and organisations, but we also encourage government agencies and consumer organisations to participate so all stakeholders are represented.

Is the circular economy your area of expertise? Are you fascinated by sustainability? Would you like to take your seat at the table and play a role in standards development? [Register now](#) as an expert. Or would

you first like to know more about how everything works? To get to know the NBN and your fellow experts? Then register for free for our [Circular Economy kick-off event](#).

What impact are we hoping for?

On the one hand, we want to keep advancing technology and growing awareness; on the other hand, we also want to improve living standards. Of course, economic considerations need to be taken into account so it remains a profitable exercise. We also need to look beyond a win-lose scenario; sustainability is now an integral part of the economic chain. With this shift of focus from the short-term to a longer horizon, we must also dare to approach the situation differently.

Should we expect a shift from sustainability to accountability?

Absolutely! In fact, it's a basic requirement. We need to address the root of the problem. But we also need to remember that some things take a little more time. We can't change our production process or consumer behaviour overnight; it's an evolution that happens gradually. And standards give us a push in the right direction.

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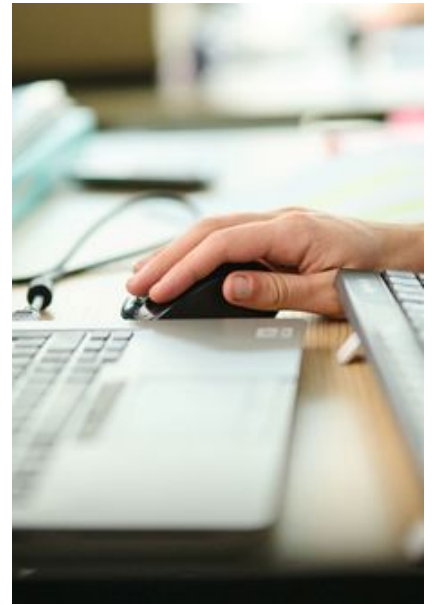
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rue Joseph II
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