STANDARDS ASIA

ISO 27001
IN HEALTHCARE

A
LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

Engaging
INDUSTRIES & CONSUMERS IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

Importance of
STANDARDS DRIVEN CULTURE CAN MANAGE GLOBAL CRISIS BETTER

ACT PROACTIVEly
MAKE STANDARDS MANDATORY

Standards users

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STANDARDS ASIA

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Since digitalisation has been an exciting step forward, the Malaysian Association of Standards Users (Standards Users) wishes to truly connect with local and worldwide consumers through its annual magazine to communicate the organization's news, introduce ISO standards, Malaysian Standards, policies and best practices to demonstrate its true values, speak of its aspirations and convey an overall mission to help consumers worldwide. In a time when many consumers have lost jobs and many businesses are struggling to survive, this magazine is an instrumental guide to improve the survival of all.

Standards Users is actively involved in cultivating the implementation of standards in order to ensure business sustainability through risk management. Standards help support basic consumer protection by raising levels of quality, safety, reliability, efficiency and interchangeability. They can be an effective tool in consumer protection as they provide a basis for national legislation and certification schemes. They can also be regarded as best practices for use in promoting business and in litigation for damages. What consumers want in general are BEST Goods and Services for the BEST Value and AVAILABLE to ALL.

DR. MARIMUTHU NADASON

**"QUALITY IS NEVER AN ACCIDENT.
IT IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF INTELLIGENT EFFORT"**

John Ruskin

STANDARDS ASIA

ISO 27001 IN HEALTHCARE

WRITTEN BY
G.SARAVANAN
Director
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So, what exactly do these criminals go after? To understand this, we would need to review what is available inside a healthcare institution. Such enterprises usually store information digitally and on paper.

Securing this is an important factor when it comes to patient safety in healthcare institutions. Patient EMR (Electronic Medical Records) data such as doctor's case notes, lab reports, radiology reports, medication information, are sensitive and should only be accessed and used by those with correct authorization.

And in the private sector, the data involves financial data, insurance, banking details, family, relations, and many other aspects of one's life, which makes a hospital a treasure trove for criminals. An incredible amount of patient data are located in a hospital, confidential data that's worth a lot of money to criminals who can sell it on easily – making the industry a growing target.

These organizations have a duty to protect their patients' personal records and it's becoming increasingly important for hospitals to keep their information secure. Besides the obligations to their patients and partners, hospitals that do take cybersecurity seriously are also liable to the authorities. Ignoring Information security carries huge financial penalties. Any security breach could set a healthcare enterprise back by RM 500,000 for Malaysian PDPA (Personal Data Protection Act) or 20 Million euros for European GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

On another note, if a hospital plans to retrieve their data from ransomware, it comes with hundreds of thousands of ringgit price tags – all these are real and an alarming thought for the healthcare industry that's already struggling with financing situation and their daily work demands.

IN THE YEAR 2020,

22 billion medical & financial records, was stolen of which 36% of all major security incidents, originated from hospital security incidents. Covid-19 has said to spike these data breaches and has costed the health care industry approximately USD $5.6 billion in terms of financial loss which is growing massively, according to Becker's Hospital Review.

This number is rising exponentially in 2021, no thanks to Covid-19. In Malaysia, we do not have official statistics, but it is known that the numbers are rising, but it is not published as it defames the image of healthcare institution, which is also the case around the world.

Lets look at why healthcare organizations struggle to manage their cybersecurity threats. Below are some of the reasons:

1 ## COST FACTOR

- Generally, hospitals are considered as a costly affair - net revenues are perceived to be declining, driven by flat revenues and increasing operating expenses.
- Hence maintaining cybersecurity or engaging in third-party contractors is never on the high priority list of the management.
- Most are under the mindset of things are working fine, so why fix it (when nothing is broken)?

2 ## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- Hospitals are a busy bunch. Most often Healthcare enterprises staffs are some of the busiest and most in demand in the country.
- Medical staffs work long hours and on very tight deadlines, with patients life at stake – which means they simply don't have the time or resources to add security processes to their workload.
- Medical professionals need slick working practices with minimal distractions. Information technology on the other hand requires constant change, update, upgrade, technology refresh, not to mention the sensitive nature of the software and its bugs.
- Cybersecurity and its practices & limitations are probably the last things medical staff need in their day-to-day work and is the reason why hospital management avoids many disruptions or changes to the Information Systems within hospitals.

3 ## DEVICE COMPLEXITIES

- Device complexity makes hospital cybersecurity a challenge. Like many other enterprises with a large staff base and a physical space, hospitals need to manage the large number of devices used by both by administrators, medical staffs, patients, and their visitors to transact businesses, provide care, and pass time.
- Besides having hundreds of iPhones, Android devices, tablets and personal laptops as a part of the BYOD(Bring Your Own Device) policy, a hospital is also home to many types of medical equipment with operating systems that are probably older than your age.
- Getting this equipment updated with the latest operating system is not only a strenuous task for the operations team, but it is also a costly one. Equipment suppliers and ven-dors mostly charge a huge amount of money for such update and upgrade activities. These costs are looked at as unnecessary by the management, hence the lack of motivation to embark on such activities.
- All these which makes this equipment prime targets for criminals, as it is well known that equipment which are not updated expose various security loopholes which can be easily exploited by criminals.

Due to the above challenges, healthcare enterprises are slow to address and safeguard their cybersecurity needs. The impact of not managing the security is a heavy one, some as follows:

1. RANSOMWARE:

Hackers use ransomware control and blackmail hospital devices, servers or even entire networks. In most cases, a ransom is then demanded to rectify the encryption, in bitcoin, which makes it difficult to trace and catch such criminals. In the US alone, 600 clinics, hospitals and healthcare organizations were attacked by 92 individual ransomware attacks, affecting 18 million patient records in 2020. The costs of these attacks are almost $21 billion, according to a US government study.

2. CLOUD SECURITY:

Protected health information such as medical records and financial records are increasingly being stored on the cloud. Without the right security measures such as penetration testing, firewall, policy and procedure for cloud security operations, the cloud is increasingly becoming the weak honeypot for the security of health care organizations.

3. PHISHING ATTACKS:

Phishing is the fraudulent method to get sensitive information or data, such as usernames, passwords, or any other personal information details by imper-sonating oneself as a trustworthy entity in any digital communication. Healthcare enterprises are an excellent target for such attacks, due to the complex working environment and the rush to gets things done. Staffs lack cybersecurity edu-cation, adhering to any available policy and procedure before providing any sensitive information is non-existent.

According to HIMSS (Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society), some of other security incidents by statistics in the year 2020 are :

- ✅ Phishing attacks (reported by 57% of HIMSS members)
- ✅ Credential harvesting attacks (21%)
- ✅ Social engineering attacks other than phishing (20%)
- ✅ Ransomware or other malware (20%)
- ✅ Theft or loss (16%)
- ✅ Website or web application attacks (14%)
- ✅ Negligent insider activity (13%)
- ✅ Breach or data leakage (11%)
- ✅ Malicious insider activity (10%)

The standard helps organizations to assess their information risks, then treat them - using information security controls, according to their needs, using the guidance and suggestions where relevant. Given the dynamic nature of information risk and security, the ISMS concept incorporates continuous feedback and improvement activities to respond to changes in the threats, vulnerabilities, or impacts of incidents.

The ISO 27001 standard has 114 controls, in 14 logical groupings with 35 categories:

A.5:   Information security policies (2 controls)
A.6:   Organization of information security (7 controls)
A.7:   Human resource security - 6 controls that are applied before, during, or after employment
A.8:   Asset management (10 controls)
A.9:   Access control (14 controls)
A.10: Cryptography (2 controls)
A.11: Physical and environmental security (15 controls)
A.12: Operations security (14 controls)
A.13: Communications security (7 controls)
A.14: System acquisition, development and maintenance (13 controls)
A.15: Supplier relationships (5 controls)
A.16: Information security incident management (7 controls)
A.17: Information security aspects of business continuity management (4 controls)
A.18: Compliance; with internal requirements, such as policies, and with external requirements, such as laws (8 controls)

So, how should an organization such as Healthcare Organization start to address its cybersecurity strategy? This is where the ISO 27000 series of standards becomes a useful tool to address these issues.

The ISO/IEC 27000-series (also known as the 'ISMS Family of Standards' or 'ISO27K' for short) comprises of information security standards published jointly by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electro-technical Commission (IEC).

It is a family of standards, which provides various controls, to all aspects of cybersecurity for an organization. It is not healthcare specific, as it addresses all generic areas which need to be covered for any enterprise, regardless of the size or industry. It is very similar to the likes of ISO 9000 series for quality and ISO 14000 for the environmental protection standards

While there are many sections of the series, the typical organizations are encouraged to start from ISO 27001: 2013 (the latest update to the standard), this is also known as the Information Security Management System (ISMS). And it is the de-facto standard on how to manage cybersecurity for an organization, such as a hospital. This series is broad in scope, i.e: privacy, confidentiality and IT/tech-nical/cybersecurity issues.

The **Standard** helps organizations to have a broad perspective of their cybersecurity strategy.

It helps to map out the various aspects which need to be assessed to conduct a gap analysis between where the organization stands now, and where they need to be, in terms of their **cybersecurity planning**.

Broad areas such as **People**, **Products**, **Processes**, **Partners**, **Projects** are all involved here, internally as well as externally.

A LOOK INTO FUTURE

WRITTEN BY
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Standards
Australia is Australia's leading independent, not-for-profit standards organisation, continuously serving the community since its formation in 1922.

Our purpose in developing standards is to provide value to Australia, its businesses, and its people. With stronger standards in place, Australia can enjoy greater economic efficiency and increased prominence on the international stage. Robust standards also support our local communities by building a safer, more sustainable environment.

We provide innovative solutions and strategic initiatives whilst being a trusted voice across a plethora of international fora. Working with industry experts, we assist in the development of Australian standards and the adaptation of internationally aligned standards to fit the needs of industry, government and our communities.

As Australian members of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) we connect Australia with the rest of the world through standards. Aligning standards to be recognised internationally strengthens Australia's global relationships and the economy and allows Australia to work with other nations to guide standardisation development.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS
"There can be few organisations that have made such an essential contribution to our quality of life as Standards Australia while leaving so few footprints in public awareness." Winton Higgins, Engines of Change.

Over the past one hundred years, Standards Australia has developed into an organisation that represents consumer safety, occupational health, energy management and more – all to improve the quality and comfort of everyday life.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Change through innovation is at the core of what we do and is achieved by consistently providing strategic solutions across our 13 sectors.

Sustainability and renewable energy have been key focuses for Standards Australia and we have contributed to the publication of several standards across hydrogen, wind energy, solar (PV), and grid stability.

BETTER DISTRIBUTION SOLUTIONS

A key objective of Standards Australia is to provide accessible standards to industry and community. We recently announced an exciting step forward with the upcoming launch of the Standards Store. This seamlessly integrated platform will, for the first time, give customers a choice of how they would like to access standards – printed or digitally.

The Standards Store will also include innovative features that allow customers to browse categories, search for terms and track for updates to specific standards. It will even allow customers to preview standards before purchasing.

The newly developed Strategic Initiatives team will deliver critical projects that strategically or economically benefit Australia and Australian stakeholders, helping to create industries of the future.

Working with industry, academia, government agencies, and community associations we will deliver consensus standards and other guidance to address the daily, real-world challenges.

As an innovative leader, we add value to Australian industry, government and community across 13 sectors;

☑ Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Food

☑ Building & Construction

☑ Communications, Information Technology and e-Commerce Services

☑ Consumer Products, Services & Safety

☑ Education & Training Services

☑ Electrotechnology & Energy

☑ Health & Community Services

☑ Manufacturing & Processing

☑ Mining

☑ Public Safety, Public Administration, Business & Management

☑ Transport & Logistics

☑ Water & Waste Services

☑ Oil & Gas

With a history of supporting the Australian community, diverse stakeholder engagement and cross-border standardisation, Standards Australia plans on continuing to be the 'engine of change' for the next 100 years.

A TRUSTED VOICE

Standards Australia's reputation as a trusted advisor to policymakers and industry leaders, on both a national and international level, is of utmost importance to us. Within Australia we contribute significant value to the economic growth as well as the health and safety of communities.

Internationally, we are a trusted voice in assisting regional economies in the use of standards. Our General Manager of Operations, Kareen Riley-Takos, is a board member of the IEC Standardization Management Board (SMB), overseeing the management and supervision of the IEC's standards work.

Head of International, Karen Batt, was recently elected to the ISO Technical Management Board (TMB). She assisted Standards Australia in entering a mentoring arrangement with the Institute of Standards of Cambodia (ISC) along with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). The objective of the agreement is to provide guidance on Cambodia's key focus on the development of their National Electrotechnology committee.

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

Standards Australia is experiencing exciting changes!

Currently, we are expanding our departments from Stakeholder Engagement, Voice of the Customer to Strategic Initiatives to ensure our key stakeholders are supported throughout the standards development journey.

We are a strong voice within the Australian community, with an ongoing objective to not only educate our current industry, but our future innovators and leaders as well.

Last year, Standards Australia announced the launch of the 'Construct NSW eLearning module' in partnership with NSW Officer of the Building Commissioner. It is an in-depth educational training resource for construction standards.

Standards Australia's ongoing educational program, NEXTgen, is an opportunity for participants to understand the national and international standardisation processes. The year-long program provides training with direct exposure into the world of standards. By investing in the future generation of leaders and experts we are supporting the future of standards development.

Last year, Standards Australia held the first NEXTgen Bootcamp. The program virtually hosted 15 of Telstra's recent graduates, introducing them to the world of standards. The program provided insights into how standards shape the world, discussed standards development and innovation and encouraged the next generation of young professionals to become involved.

In addition to the NEXTgen program, Standards Australia has a Graduate Program which aims to educate the next generation of emerging leaders. The second annual intake of graduates saw an overwhelming response. From the 365 applications, four graduates were onboarded for the 12-month program.

This year's graduates are from different fields of study and will spend the year learning about the standards development process. During the program, each graduate will rotate throughout various departments within the business, gaining invaluable industry experience.

We spoke with 2020 graduate, George Sfinas, who has now taken up a role as Engagement Officer and 2021 graduate, Jasmine Brinsmead, for insights into the life of a Standards Australia graduate.

We spoke with 2020 graduate, George Sfinas, who has now taken up a role as Engagement Officer and 2021 graduate, Jasmine Brinsmead, for insights into the life of a Standards Australia graduate.

EMERGING LEADERS

Before joining the Standards Australia graduate program in 2020, studied a Bachelor of Arts and Business at University of New South Wales (UNSW). Throughout his degree he worked in administration and retail and volunteered at the Australian Cancer Research Foundation.

When asked what attracted him to the Standards Australia Graduate Program, George said he liked how the structure gave a comprehensive tour of the organisation. "It had a healthy level of working with government, industry and different sectors of the Australia economy."

Throughout the program, George, along with three other graduates, rotated through the Standards Development, Product and Stakeholder and International Engagement teams.

"My time in the Standards Development team exposed me to the committee aspect of the company, including liaising with primary contacts and constituting committees. Working with International Engagement allowed me to work on a range of interesting projects and initiatives.

"Finishing the program in the Product team really closed the loop in my learning. Until that point, I had a view of standards that was only at a committee level. In the Product team, I was given the chance to talk to tradespeople and practitioners who use standards in their day-to-day life. During the program, I learnt my passion was in the engagement side of the business."

Having successfully completed the program, George has accepted an exciting role with Standards Australia as an Engagement Officer working with the Building, Construction and Water and Waste Services sectors.

"My current goal is to become an expert in **Building, Construction and Water and Waste Services** sectors and hone my skills within them. I can get to know and understand the stakeholders and can contribute to the development of standards that benefit the Australian community,"

George Sfinas

Throughout 2021, George will also be assisting and mentoring one of the new graduates. His mentee, Jasmine Brinsmead, began her first rotation in the Marketing and Communications department.

Having completed a degree in International Relations with a major in Global Sustainable Development at the University of Wollongong, Jasmine is passionate about sustainability and social change.

"I have always been socially and economically conscious. After I completed an internship in Fiji where I helped develop a social enterprise for the community, I fell in love with stakeholder engagement and making a positive social impact."

After university, Jasmine was on the lookout for a program that would give her the ability to work with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. "The Standards Australia Graduate Program drew me in, as the organisation is a confluence, working with all members of society."

Jasmine says there are some aspects of Standards Australia she was happy to learn about –
"The organisation draws from every member in the community; everyone has a seat at the table. I was surprised to hear academics could sit on committees, as I originally thought it was all technically based. The public commenting process is also fantastic. Anyone can sign up and have their opinion on a standard. It's 'all in' service to the community."

When asked what she wanted to get out from her year at Standards Australia she responded with, "I want a well-founded knowledge of the organisation, to understand how each department interacts and works with each other and get a behind the scenes look. A perk specific to Standards Australia would be the ability to meet people from all different areas of Australian industry."
The area of standardisation that peaks Jasmine's interest, is innovation and technology.

While early in the program, Jasmine says she has experienced comprehensive support and training. "It's great to know I will be invested in for a whole year, so that I'm prepared to take on a role after the program. I have always wanted to be part of a change and an organisation that considers future generations. Standards Australia offers that potential."

"I WOULD LOVE TO ENGAGE INTERNATIONALLY ON CROSS BORDER ISSUES LIKE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CYBER SECURITY. I AM ALSO REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO LEARNING TECHNICAL SKILLS – SOFTWARE, BUSINESS OPERATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS."

JASMINE BRINSMEAD

ENGAGING INDUSTRIES & CONSUMERS IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

WRITTEN BY
VINASH SINGH
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Both mandatory and voluntary standards being practiced in Fiji benefit public health, safety, and the environment. The Fijian consumers benefit from the development and design of new and improved requirements for the safety and quality of the products which they buy and the services which consumers rely upon each day. While a standard is a technical expression of how to make a product safe, efficient, and compatible with others, development and implementation of it will only be effective if it incorporates the views of both consumers and businesses, given they are the key stakeholders which will be impacted by it.

NEEDS OF CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS

The involvement of consumers provides assurance by increasing consumer confidence when personnel, products, systems, processes, or services are evaluated against the requirements of a voluntary standard. Products and standards that take consumer needs into account are more likely to be accepted into the marketplace, and more likely to be adopted into regulation where applicable.

Involvement of consumer feedback and views in standardization not only promotes safer, healthier, and more environmentally sound products and services, it also increases confidence in the quality and reliability of products and services available.

HOW IS THIS DONE IN FIJI?

In order to independently represent the interests of consumers, Fiji has the Consumer Council of Fiji which promotes consumer solidarity and recommends policies to protect and promote consumer interest.

The Council is a statutory body established under the Consumer Council Act (Cap 235). The Council, as a watchdog protects the rights and interests of consumers by promoting a fair and just delivery of goods and services. The Consumer Council of Fiji is an advocacy organisation, conducting rigo-rous research and policy analysis on key consumer issues.

CCF's insight into consumer needs is a powerful tool for influencing decision-makers to bring about change. The Council protects vulnerable groups such as rural poor, physically and mentally challen-ged, children and women by identifying and articulating policy issues that are of importance to consumers.

It is vital for businesses to be involved in the standard development of a country as this will:

1. Facilitate business interaction (gives businesses a voice);

2. Provide a platform to enable businesses to comply with the relevant laws and regulations in place (or feedback on new laws);

3. Promote sustainable products to the market; and,

4. Provide interoperability between existing and new goods, services and processes.

The Council is legally mandated to do such acts and things it considers necessary or expedient to ensure that the interests of consumers of goods and services are promoted and protected. These functions include: advising Ministers on matters affecting the interests of the consumers; making representations to the Government or to any other person/organizations on any issues affecting the interests of consumers; collecting, collating and disseminating information in respect of matters affecting the interests of consumers; supporting or maintaining legal proceedings initiated by a consumer, where such support is deemed necessary; conducting research and investigations into matters affecting consumers; advising and assisting consumers on matters affecting their interests.

As such, the Council recognizes the importance of standards as it encompasses critical consumer issues such as product compatibility; quality of products and services; ease of use and accessibility; the environment, health, and safety; and corporate and social responsibility.

In order to ensure that the rights of consumers are protected through the development and implementation of standards, the Council has submitted proposals to the DNTMS and work is undertaken to implement standardization of many consumer products.

Additionally, all proposed policies and legislation that has an impact on consumers are first submitted to the Council to ensure that the views and interests of consumers are promoted and protected before being implemented.

DID YOU KNOW?

Companies that are most successful in their sectors **recognize** that **standards** and **conformance** are business tools that should be managed **right** alongside their **quality**, **safety**, intellectual **property**, and **environmental** policies.

Some of the recent submissions made by the Council in regards to standards include; the review of the Trade Standards and Quality Control Act 1992 and submission on the need for national standards in Importation of Electrical Items.

THE NEED TO INVOLVE BUSINESSES

Standards are created by involving stakeholders with experience and expertise from different sectors, such as public authorities, professional bodies, trade associations, consumer organisations, environmental organisations, enforcement agencies and businesses, to name a few.

Demonstrating compliance to standards helps products, services and personnel to cross borders, ensuring that products manufactured in one country can be sold and used in another. Furthermore, business can not only reduce the economic risk of research and development activities by participating in standardization, but can also lower costs by relying on existing standards.

Involving businesses in standard development will also form the basis for innovations and introduction to new technology in efforts to ensure that the goods and services provided by traders are compatible to the needs and wants of consumers.

A YOUNG LEADER IN CONSUMER COUNCIL, FIJI

With the intention to promote standards development work as a career of choice among young people in Asia. The Council is nominating Mr. Vinash Singh; Manager Campaigns. Information & Media to promote standards development in Fiji. Mr. Singh has a Master's degree in Business Administration and has carried out advocacy and policy work in his previous roles in the Fijian Government. Mr. Singh is also a member of Consumers International Next Generation Leaders Network.

The network brings together 29 innovative consumer advocates between the ages of 18 and 30, representing 29 of Consumers International members across 25 countries globally.

This provides the Council with an avenue to raise consumer issues on international platforms one of which is standards. Mr. Sing is passionate about consumer advocacy and creating a market place which is safe and fair to consumers and recognizes the importance of standard in achieving this.

Mr. Singh also gives policy advice to government bodies through the Council's Chief Executive Officer who is a member of the Trade Standards Advisory Council (TSAC) and the National CODEX Alimentarius Committee.
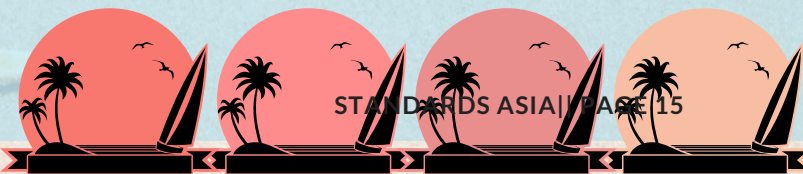
STANDARDS DRIVEN CULTURE CAN
MANAGE GLOBAL CRISIS BETTER

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PANDEMIC

has completely shattered the lives of the consumers. Nothing remains the same, our preferences and our basic needs have been altered. What was least desired by us during our usual shopping spree before the onset of the pandemic has now become our most basic essential.

This sudden shift in needs and demand of consumers has its own repercussions as most of these "new essential products" fills up the market at a rapid phase, most often with least quality checks and enforcement, to keep up with the growing demand.

> " WITHOUT **STANDARDS**, THERE CAN BE NO **IMPROVEMENT** "
>
> TAIICHI OHNO

FAKE & COUNTERFEITS PROLIFERATING

Such rapid changes are already been seen across various products, most commonly in healthcare and cleaning products. Products like soaps, hand washers, toilet paper, tissues, wet wipes, face masks and other personal protective equipment, sanitizers and floor cleaners are flying off the shelves as it lands.

The never before seen rush for these products has encouraged the proliferation of their sub-standard and fake products. From personal protective equipment, face mask, and cleaning products to health and safety products, impostors are taking better advantage of the situation created by the pandemic. According to the Preventive Wear Manufacturers Association of India, almost 150 new manufacturing units have been set up in just three months in India during this pandemic, of which most are counterfeiting brands.

It has been reported that Interpol's global pharmaceutical crime-fighting unit is seizing dangerous pharmaceuticals worth over millions of dollars every month across various countries since the onset of the pandemic. Such illegal and dangerous trade is more rampant in Asian countries where standards and regulations are not that strictly enforced when compared to their western counterparts.

For instance, the Customs and Excise Department in Hong Kong seized consignments of counterfeit surgical masks bound for overseas, about 330,000 bogus 3M-brand N95 respirators, worth over 8.5 million of Hong Kong dollars very recently and the seizure was the third such big seizure in recent months.

Likewise, Indonesian Police raided an illegal facemask factory and warehouse in North Jakarta and found that the factory earned a profit of up to USD18,000 from selling their illegal products. In another raid on a warehouse in West Jakarta, the police seized 600,000 illegal facemasks. World over one could read such news reports of confiscated counterfeit face masks and fake medicines. Such an alarming situation is not just limited to developing economies or in Asia.

In April 2020, the Department of Homeland Security seized over 225 shipments of mislabeled, fraudulent, unauthorized, or prohibited COVID-19 test kits, treatment kits, homeopathic remedies, purported anti-viral products, and personal protective equipment.

US IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Now that everything had gone online, including education and work, across most parts of the globe, we could see an increased use of electronic gadgets. The small state of Kerala in India itself had seen a 400 percent increase in the sale of laptops. But a shortage of labour and social distancing norms is hindering the supply of these electronic products to the market and most recognised manufacturers are unable to either scale up production as well ensure uninterrupted distribution.

These limitations have now paved way for refurbished and counterfeit products to swell up and take over, putting consumers at peril. Smartphones and accessories worth lakhs were seized by the local enforcement officials during a raid in just two shops in India's capital city.

CONSUMERS NOT REALLY SAFE

So the consumers are not safe anywhere and their life and health are put at risk more than ever before after the onset of a pandemic. Consumers are more easily tricked by substandard products due to panic buying. The sudden steep in demand coupled with inadequate regulation of the market in most of the countries has resulted in the flooding of markets with both domestic and foreign sub-standard products.

Besides, loss of jobs and economic recession due to pandemic has considerably affected the consumer's purchasing power, and a majority of the population even knowingly purchase such low quality products that are seldom manufactured following standard procedures. Given that the pandemic appears to last even longer than expected, the stress on the supply chains and distribution channels will certainly further aggravate thus facilitating a fertile ground for grey market goods

ACT PROACTIVELY
– MAKE STANDARDS MANDATORY

Weak and inconsistent regulatory frameworks of most countries to prevent, deter and punish offenders who manufacture or traffic substandard consumer goods has thus become more evident in the rapidly evolving circumstances of the pandemic.

Given this miserable situation, responsibility largely lies upon the government and enforcement officials to act proactively and enforce standards thereby protecting the interest of consumers. It should be remembered that substandard and counterfeit consumer products are most likely to reach consumers in situations where there is constrained access to quality and safe products, poor governance and weak technical capacity.

So there is an imperative need to regularly monitor the marketplace for verifying whether consumer products comply with the national or international standards and do not pose a danger to human health or safety.

Such stringent enforcement of standards can considerably help in reducing the threat the pandemic cause, though cannot aid in eradicating it. Good quality medicines, personal hygiene products and protective equipment's can do wonders during this time. But unfortunately, despite the crucial role that standards play in facilitating safe transactions, most countries have failed to give due importance to enforce them even more strictly than ever before.

In fact most developing and lesser developing economies do not have standards driven culture and whatever standards are there are hardly enforced or checked upon. There is an absence of strict regulations. These economies need to bring in mandatory standards for an even wider variety of products than at present.

> **Bureau of Indian Standards has more than 25,000 quality standards for different products and services but only around 150 products are under mandatory certification.**

While such a move would be beneficial to the consumers at large any swift action taken in this aspect would drastically affect the domestic manufacturers. Only a gradual introduction and promotion of mandatory standards is viable and the domestic manufacturers should be guided and trained effectively to strengthen their capacity to change and become equally competent to produce in line with international practices. Considerable trade growth can be achieved through better management of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment.

Moreover, the WTO agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade encourages all member countries to adopt international standards and also move towards mutual recognition of their certification systems. This sounds more sensible and pertinent in this pandemic season where experts predict more such similar outbreaks in coming years. Countries need to learn from the current experience and brace themselves to take on future crises, if any, with ease. The establishment and enforcement of standards, therefore, not only becomes vital to raise the competitiveness of the industry but also promotes and ensures the global health and wellness of consumers.

Likewise, in Philippines only 86 products come under mandatory certification and in China, almost 85 percent of the standards are voluntary with 15 percent coming under mandatory certification. Therefore, in most countries most of the products produced come under voluntary certification thereby encouraging production and distribution of substandard products.

Bringing products within the ambit of mandatory certification would substantially discourage the production and sale of substandard and fake goods. This will also promote the spirit of production and would push the domestic manufacturers of various products and services in line with international practices.

Apart from protecting consumers and instilling confidence in them, substantial growth in trade can be realised through effective management of standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment. More importantly, it can effectively curb the import of all sub-standard products that keep flooding the domestic markets. Such a move would play an important role in enhancing competitiveness and market access and help supply chains to be more transparent and secure.

For these reasons, viz. international trade, industry competitiveness, sustainable development, and consumer protection, **standards-driven culture** has become **pertinent** and a very **important** ingredient in the supportive infrastructure of a country so as to **manage** the **global crisis situations better.**

FAIR
EASY
EFFICIENT

NCCC

NATIONAL CONSUMER COMPLAINTS CENTRE
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