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US National Body Contribution in Response to JTC 1 N 9238 – Draft Standing Document for Best Practices on Teleconferencing

The US endorses in principle the adoption of JTC 1 N9238, Draft of Standing Document for best practices on teleconferencing, as a JTC 1 Standing Document provided it clearly differentiates informative versus normative text as shown below. In addition, a substantive change is suggested to the first bullet under "Other Meeting Practices."

Draft of Standing Document for best practices on teleconferencing:

Reasons for allowing teleconferences:
- The principal advantage of teleconferencing over other non-physical meeting mechanisms is the real-time nature, the opportunity for immediate reaction and the possibility to provide a response to every contribution.
- Teleconferencing can also allow for more work to be done in a given timeframe
- Teleconferencing can minimize travel and therefore save resources

Meeting planning and organization:
- *Agreement on the use of teleconferencing shall be made by consensus of the group.*
- Invitations, agendas and timetables shall be available a minimum of two weeks in advance of the teleconference. All papers to be discussed (*or reviewed*) during the meeting shall also be available at least 2 weeks in advance to allow participants to have the opportunity to study the inputs before the meeting. The first teleconference requires that the procedures outlined in section 7.6.1 be followed and that this document be distributed to all participants.
- The most effective teleconferences have a limited scope, clear objectives and a limited number of participants
- Two hours should be the maximum duration of a teleconference.
- For teleconferences, all hours should only be given in GMT/UTC. Each participant makes its own correspondence with local time. www.timeanddate.com is a useful tool
- It is a sound principle to share the inconvenience among participants by rotating times whenever possible. However, in practice, this depends very much on where the participants are located. If the meeting participants are distributed worldwide and come from most JTC1 members, in practice there are only two windows where the timing of a two-hours conference is bearable: 13GMT and 21GMT. This can be characterized as "where is the night", and the most frequent solution is "over the Pacific ocean" (which corresponds to 13GMT); if no participants come from Eastern Europe and the middle- East, then 23GMT can also be an option. See an example with Meeting planner http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meetingtime.html?year=2008&month=3&day=11&p1=224&p2=263&p3=195&p4=248 (details of a meeting schedule pasted below).
- Schedule should pay attention to Mondays-Fridays (since the meeting can take place very early or very late on a given day or even early the next day), to days-off and to holidays and cultural practices in countries considered
- There should be an effort to minimize costs to each participant (for example through the use of a service provider that offers local calling numbers in all countries considered).

Meeting conduct:
- The Chair should make sure that all participants are identified (some service providers offer tools such as automated roll-call)
- The Chair should make sure that all participants get on the attendance list and that proper notices and summaries are distributed (also to give credit to participants)
- The Chair should establish proper etiquette for the calls: ask participants to announce their name each time they speak, ask participants to be brief and clear, ask participants to mute their lines if they operate in a noisy environment, establish ways to ask for the floor.

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- The Chair should frequently restate the current proposals, offer summaries of discussions and refer to agenda items
- Decisions should be handled very carefully to make sure that everybody on the call is fully aware of what is being adopted. Written text available to all, roll call of delegates or of countries, confirmation by email in the days following the teleconference are possible methods to ensure this. The protocol for making decisions should be established by the group in advance (if they choose to allow them).
- The Chair should monitor the quality of the lines and should take action if the quality is not acceptable (some service providers offer diagnostics of faulty lines) or if those joining via internet calls are not managing to maintain adequate connectivity and are consequently disrupting the meeting.
- A five-minutes break should be taken after one hour of call

Other meeting practices :
- Discussion fora (electronic bulletin boards) may be used to allow participants to contribute and exchange ideas in writing without the inefficiencies/time constraints of a phone conference. Tools should be in place to restrict the use of these fora to the authorized participants.
- Teleconferences may be used in conjunction with a web meeting (or a common virtual white board) so that the chair can present slides to all attendees without the confusion about which page they're discussing. This is very useful to make sure that all participants are following the current discussion.
- A "chat" or instant messaging service among participants can be a very useful tool to keep all participants fully aware of the current stage of ongoing discussions and decisions. No transcription of this will be included in the meeting report. A moderator would be helpful to control the pace and order of conversation.
- A decision to use such tools should be made by a consensus decision of the organizing group.