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Ecma International Archival Policy and Practice

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1 Ecma's Archival Policy

In contrast to ISO/IEC Ecma has only very few written and simple policies:

- Ecma By-laws
- Ecma Rules
- Ecma Code of Conduct in Patent Matters

The up-to-date By-laws and Rules can be found on the Ecma public website (www.ecma-international.org), as well as in the yearly published so called Ecma "Mementos".

All Ecma Mementos are freely downloadable from the Ecma public website. The first Memento was published in 1962 and since then (except for 1963) every year.

Therefore one can trace the changes of the By-laws, Rules and the Patent Policy year by year but also many other useful information e.g. about Ecma membership, approval and withdrawal of standards can be found there. This is one of the archival requirements we have faced all over the year.

However, when reading the Ecma policies and rules one finds out that not a single clause is related to document archival policy. How does it come from? It comes from the Ecma philosophy to keep written rules very simple and only to have a few of them. Standards archival is regarded as one of the subjects where it was felt that its implementation is just up to the Ecma Secretariat, notably the Secretary General and mostly by using "common sense" and normal "SDO skills". Such an approach of course has advantages and disadvantages.

2 Ecma's Archival Practice

The archival practice of Ecma International is very similar to those of other SDOs.

Today basically everything is electronic and "everything" is filed "forever". We do this for due process and IPR reasons. We also have some paper storage (e.g. master standards) but the prime storage format is electronic. We have a reliable IT protection system to prevent a total break-down of the system.

Under "Everything" we understand the following:

- All contributions (from members, liaison, drafts, etc.) linked to a specific Ecma group (e.g. GA, TC45 etc...)
- All e-mail correspondence linked to specific email reflectors
- All Standards (in force and withdrawn) – with IPR declarations when received
- All Technical Reports (in force and withdrawn) - with IPR declarations when received
- Membership, experts lists
- List of tools, rules (and the tools, templates and documents themselves)
- Etc.

In the past (before 1997-2000) all was paper based.

Storage space was the bottle neck and there was not too much worry about IPR matters.

Storage space is today not an issue anymore as everything is stored electronically.

However the IPR problem is with us in a very virulent way. The validity of a standard relevant patent is 20 years but the collection of "Prior Art" documentation is without time-limit. There is also a significant change how today patent organizations and courts are looking at SDO documentation. Talks with e.g. WIPO or the European Patent Office representatives have revealed that 20 years ago when those bodies were looking for "Prior Art" to determine if a new patent could be awarded or not, they did it in books, scientific publications, conference proceedings etc. but not so much in SDO documentation. Today SDO documentation is for them one of the very important source for "Prior Art". Since practically all SDOs claim to perform "open standardization" and "open standards" and patent offices and courts also recognize SDO documents as "open publications", therefore the importance of SDO archives has been significantly raised.

In other words, from the technical SDO documentation nothing can be thrown away, ever....

The same principle is true for the "due standardization process". Just a remark: It is not defined by any SDO after how many years documentation can be destroyed and what types of documents. Ecma now keeps it de-facto "forever".

So, what did Ecma do?

- **We made an inventory of the paper documents we still had (e.g. master copies of standards, GA documents etc.)**
- **We found a list of all Ecma documents starting from 1961 (but most of the documents themselves not anymore); we scanned it and published it internally.**
- **We scanned all of our available paper archives (about 3 years of work, now completed). These scanned PDF files are now available either on our public website (e.g. old Ecma Standards, Technical Reports) or on the private website (e.g. all GA documents).**
- **We noticed that much of the old documents got unfortunately lost (space problems of the past). E.g. we have all GA documents from 1971 to until today but not earlier ones. All paper based Technical Committee documents have been destroyed.**

So, there might be cases in the future when "Historical Archive projects" have to be called upon with the hope that someone (e.g. members, experts) still have them. This might be done by Ecma but also by 3rd parties (e.g. like IMTC did it on multimedia subjects of SDOs).

3 Archival techniques

Ecma has been involved in document and storage archives for decades. There is no static standard (and technology) in both areas that will stay with us forever. We will see generations of standards and implementations, meaning that both the storage and the document archive techniques will change and we have to migrate over the time as well.

Paper archives

We are already at the minimum level (e.g. paper master-copies of standards). Currently we have no plans to reduce that further. Advantage of the paper archive: durability and no special hardware / software requirement.

Electronic Archives

We do it in a very pragmatic fashion. Currently the main archive format is PDF. But we also store the original format (e.g. MS Word, PowerPoint) when available. The current size of our archive is at present about 120 GB. With Electronic Archives we have to make sure that

when the technology moves again, we do not get locked (e.g. we shall not get locked in old data format when no one can read that anymore – so a timely conversion into a new format must be done – in worse case via “paper” medium). We shall make sure that the digital data medium should still be readable after several years of storage. It shall not happen that because of hardware, software or media aging one day we cannot read our archives anymore. However, we have not yet established a clear policy and practice for that.

Searching

In the paper archive only the “classical” paper searching is possible. One looks up the paper file where one expects the target document and then searches for the document.

In the Electronic Archives – of course - you could do many sophisticated things, including full text searching. Currently we have implemented only some very basic searching methods, i.e. searching via document lists. Each target document is numbered and identified in a unique way, and each electronic document directory contains a machine readable list of the documents that are contained in the directory. On the document list simple search is then possible.

4 Other aspects

Ecma is a small – rather centralized – SDO (unlike ISO/IEC, JTC 1). Therefore the archival and storage practice of Ecma is much simpler than the one of ISO/IEC. We indeed do not have to deal too much with decentralized secretariats and various different data archives.

In few cases some TCs have their own archival systems and tools. In that case we ask for a duplication of those archives to have a respective mirror part of the Ecma archive.