



Country: Panama

Industry: Conformity Assessments

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Summary

As a World Trade Organization (WTO) member, Panama implemented the WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) that includes the Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards. Panama's Law 23 of July 15, 1997, which established dispositions on product standards, labeling and certification policy, and redefined the functions of the Directorate General of Standards and Industrial Technology (DGNTI) and the Panamanian Commission for Industrial and Technical Standards (COPANIT). Basically, DGNTI was given the main role in establishing standards and technical regulations, while COPANIT was given an advisory role to DGNTI. The National Council for Accreditation (CNA) was charged with all national accreditations.

There are no significant market access problems related to standards and technical regulations in Panama. Certain market access problems have occurred in the past with several agricultural products, but they have been mostly related to phytosanitary issues. Please see the contact information section of this report for information regarding the Panamanian agency that deals with importation of agricultural and food products.

Banks and financial organizations that finance international trade usually require product certification to provide assurance that the business transactions will not be challenged.

According to WTO guidelines, Panama informs WTO of any standards or technical regulations activities. U.S. companies can participate in the standards development process by contacting DGNTI and submitting specific requests or suggestions. There are no limitations to participation by foreign countries.

DGNTI Panama's official representative before the International Standards Organization (ISO), point of contact with Codex Alimentarius, and official member of the Panamerican Commission of Standards (COPANT) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).

Due to technical and budget constraints, Panama's standards activities have been primarily related to a few sectors. There are standards covering products in the following sectors:

- Food technology
- Construction materials
- Metrology and measurements
- Metals
- Petrochemical and associated industries
- Paper technology
- Textiles and leather

Wood products
Plastics and rubber
Glass and ceramics
Electric industry
Chemical technology
Home products
Environmental, security and health
Packaging and product distribution
Agricultural inputs and products
Industrial fluids
Systems and mechanical components
Services: organization and company management
Energy efficiency

DGNTI has plans of incorporating tourism services in the future, considering the importance of the tourism sector in the national economy.

Products for which Panama has not set standards/regulations can enter the Panamanian market provided that they comply with standards and technical regulations from the United States, Europe or any industrialized country.

Standards Organizations

The Directorate General of Standards and Industrial Technology (DGNTI) establishes technical regulations and standards in Panama. Because of budget and other limitations, this organization has been mostly dedicated to establishing standards for food products, upon specific requests by industrial organizations and according to WTO guidelines. DGNTI establishes a semiannual working plan showing all activities it will undertake for the following six months. DGNTI performs its functions through its three departments: Standards, Certifications and the Information Center.

NIST Notify U.S. Service

Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries. **Notify U.S.** is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets. Register online at Internet URL: <http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>

Conformity Assessment

The General Directorate of Standards and Industrial Technology (DGNTI), as well as a number of public and private organizations, are responsible for conducting conformity assessments.

In Panama, several organizations conduct conformity assessments on a regular basis. These organizations include the Central Laboratory of Health from the Ministry of Health (MINSAs), the University of Panama, the Technological University of Panama, the National Secretariat of Science and Technology (SENACYT), the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA), the Consumer Protection Authority and Defense of Competition, and the Agricultural Marketing Institute (IMA).

These organizations usually provide product analyses/tests and provide technical reports which are the basis for conformity assessments and product certification decisions..

Panama does not have any Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) with U.S. organizations.

Product Certification

Once the conformity assessments have been conducted, usually on prototype products provided by the interested company/organizations, the DGNTI will issue a conformity assessment certificate. DGNTI is the only organization authorized to issue conformity assessments related to products. Other private organizations such as SGS and Bureau Veritas deal with conformity assessments on system or procedures and can issue certificates, but only related to systems or practices.

Panama and the United States have an agreement to accept product certifications related to food products.

Panama and Ecuador are working on mutual recognition of certification for textile products, Also Panama is working with Colombia on an agreement related to porcelain products.

Accreditation

The National Council for Accreditation (CNA) created by Law 23, July 15, 1997, is the government authority in charge of all national accreditations. This Council is formed by a number of government organizations including the Ministries of Commerce, Health and Agricultural Development, and the National Secretariat of Science and Technology (SENACYT). The CNA works through a technical secretariat, which is the technical body of the Council. Accreditation is largely voluntary.

The technical secretariat appoints accreditation committees, which are groups formed by specialists from the public and private sectors. These committees provide basic input for CNA decisions.

Accreditation is obligatory for organizations that deal with fuel laboratories and environmental testing laboratories. All other accreditations are voluntary.

In theory accreditation can be granted in three categories: Laboratories (calibration and testing), inspection organizations, and certifying organizations. However, the last category is not implemented yet.

As of August 15, 2008, there were thirteen organizations that had been accredited by CNA, but there were 6-7 accreditation applications under review. There are 8 accredited laboratories and 5 inspecting organizations.

Certified Organizations

According to the International Standards Organization (ISO) and Grupo Kaizen, at the end of 2007, Panama had the following certifications:

FCS Forestal	5	
EUREGAP	18	
GMP- Production practices	1	
ISO 14001- Environment	7	
ISO 22000- Innocuity		1
ISO 9001- Quality	110	
OHSAS 18001 – Labor risks	3	
Total	145	

According to these statistics, Panama is second in the region with 145 certifications. Costa Rica is the leader with 364.

Publication of Technical Regulations

All final technical norms and regulations are published by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the Official Gazette or “Gaceta Oficial.”

Law 23 requires that the Panamanian Commission for Industrial and Technical Standards (COPANIT) and the General Directorate of Standards and Industrial Technology (DGNTI) publish all agreements, technical regulations, norms and procedures.

Official Gazette or Gaceta Oficial

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Resources & Contacts

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For More Information [NOTE: only use this format, do not change it.]

The U.S. Commercial Service in Panama City can be contacted via e-mail at: enrique.tellez@mail.doc.gov;
Phone: 507-207-7080 Fax: 507-317-1658; or visit our website: www.buyusa.gov/panama

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Comments and Suggestions: We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding this market research. You can e-mail us your comments/suggestions to: Customer.Care@mail.doc.gov. Please include the name of the applicable market research in your e-mail. We greatly appreciate your feedback.

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