



# Protecting our society

## ISO's crisis management approach to all hazards

by Krister Kumlin

When I was asked to chair an ISO technical committee aimed at improving crisis management and business continuity capabilities, I had little knowledge of standardization issues, and even less of emergency management. But a lifelong career in the Swedish Foreign Service had given me experience of multilateral work, and tackling a new field of international negotiations struck me as an important task and an appealing challenge. After receiving assurances that I would be given all necessary expert support, I accepted the offer.

Five years later, I have little reason to regret that decision. Working with ISO/TC 223, *Societal security*, getting to know the people involved and gaining insights into the world of ISO have been highly rewarding. However, we have yet to deliver practical results.

### A market need for standards

In response to the increase in man-made and natural catastrophes that occurred in the beginning of the century, ISO decided in 2004 to review its efforts in security. A number of countries had already developed or were in the process of elaborating national standards for societal security, and

there was a clear need to synchronize these efforts internationally.

Established in 2000 on a Russian initiative, ISO/TC 223 was found to be the natural vehicle. The failure of the international Arctic salvage operation of the atomic submarine *Kursk* had prompted Moscow to suggest that ISO help develop International Standards for emergency management.

After several years of inactivity, the responsibility of ISO/TC 223 was handed over to the Swedish Standards Institute (SSI). An early step in the committee's reactivation was its name change from *Civil defence* to the broader *Societal security*. We gradually discovered that the latter term is interpreted

differently in different parts of the world, but we decided to retain the title as long as there was a common understanding of the committee's scope of activities.

### Addressing all hazards

ISO/TC 223 develops International Standards that aim to increase societal security, which means protection of society from and response to disruptive incidents, emergencies, and disasters caused by intentional and unintentional human acts, natural hazards and technical failures. An "all-hazards perspective" covers adaptive, proactive and reactive strategies before, during and after a disruptive incident. Societal security is a multi-disciplinary field involving actors from the public and private sectors, including not-for-profit organizations.

Work on ISO/TC 223 began with considerable optimism. Our plan was to build on the five major works on emergency management already in existence from Australia, Israel, Japan, the UK and the USA. Representatives of these countries agreed to elaborate a common approach based on their respective national documents.

In purely technical terms this "best of five" approach was highly successful. By

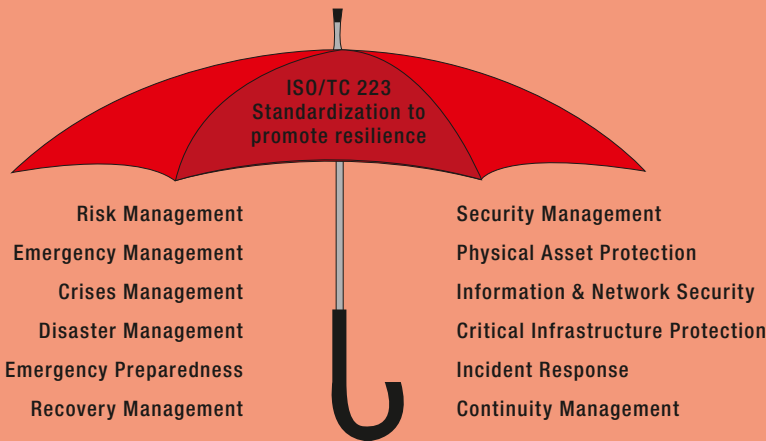


### About ISO/TC 223, *Societal security*

ISO/TC 223 promotes the adaptive capacity of:

- Individuals
- Organizations
- Communities
- Society

...confronted with the risk of disruptive events (intentional, unintentional and naturally caused). This adaptive capacity is known as resilience.



ISO/TC 223 aspires to answer how individuals, organizations, communities and society can:

- Anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disruptive events potentially resulting in an incident, emergency, crisis or disaster
- Protect assets (human, physical, intangible and environmental) from disruptive events
- Identify, assess, and leverage their capacity and capabilities to withstand disruptive events.

ISO/TC 223 provides tools to enhance capacity and demonstrate improved performance through:

- Standardization for the prevention and management of disruptive events
- Standardization to promote collaboration and coordination of incident identification, response and recovery
- Standardization for the design, deployment and evaluation of technical capabilities.

ISO/TC 223 brings together experts from developing and developed countries across the globe. Stakeholders are primarily organizations in the private and public sectors, including emergency service providers, contingency planners, small and medium-sized enterprises, critical infrastructure providers, consumer groups, governmental and regulatory bodies, NGOs, development agencies, and relief organizations.

the end of 2007, a Norwegian-led working group announced that members had agreed on a joint text. ISO/TC 223 could celebrate its first deliverable: a publicly available specification ISO/PAS 22399:2007, *Societal security – Guideline for incident preparedness and operational continuity management*. From a political perspective, however, these celebrations turned out to be premature when some of the five major players had second thoughts. As it became clear that their own national standards would not prevail, initial enthusiasm for the common product began to evaporate. The cost of modifying national solutions would be too high.

*Societal security is a multi-disciplinary field.*

These early developments illustrate a longstanding issue in standardization: to what extent are countries prepared to relinquish their own solutions in search for common ground? ISO's experience has many success stories, but this remains a challenge that slows down adoption of some standards.

### The challenges

In my experience, the life of a technical committee can be divided into two phases. The first is a philosophical phase, with seemingly endless expert discussions on committee structure relative to substance, on what we want to do versus what we ought to do. Standardizing procedures is far more complex than standardizing products. Sometimes long-drawn out discussions take place on the exact wording of a business plan rather than on what is actually happening in the outside world, be it in Haiti, the Pakistani plains or the American Gulf Coast.



But the philosophical phase is a necessary preliminary. In the case of ISO/TC 223, it served to identify needs and aspirations between major players and within the developing world, clearing up technical issues to reach agreement on a balance between organizational resilience and business continuity-based management systems that will best serve the interests of societal security.

The relatively slow pace of progress in ISO/TC 223 is a reflection of the complexity of the issue rather than of substantive disagreements between committee members. Building consensus is moreover a huge challenge, and that is exactly why ISO was created, to provide a platform for exchanging views and agreeing on best practice solutions. Having experienced how difficult this is in practice, my admiration for this work is even greater.

### Time for action

At our 10<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, superbly organized by the Thai Industrial Standards Institute (TISI) in Bangkok in December 2010, we achieved a breakthrough of sorts. By all indications, after four years of ground-clearing discussions, ISO/TC 223 is now about to enter the second phase, the phase of maturity and, hopefully, of practical action.

During the coming six months, each of the five working groups will put forward a number of proposals at various points

within the ISO balloting timetable. These relate to:

- Terminology
- Business continuity management systems
- Video surveillance
- Emergency management (incident response, public warning and shared situation awareness)
- Requirements for organizational resilience
- Guidelines for exercises and testing.

So far, ISO/TC 223 has registered only two deliverables: a technical report ISO/TR 22312:2010, in which different existing technological capabilities relevant to security standardization efforts are explored, and ISO/PAS 22399:2007, *Societal security – Guideline for incident preparedness and operational continuity management*, the “best of five” document described above. By the end of next year, deliverables should be completed at a regular pace. Although work is progressing, the technical committee would benefit if a larger number of practitioners (as opposed to standards experts) would join the effort.

Special attention is given to the participation of developing countries. Apart from the five substantive working groups, the ISO/TC 223 has set up a developing country contact group intended to encourage long-term



participation in the work of the committee while facilitating local standardization of security measures.

The ISO Committee on developing country matters (ISO/DEVCO) has regularly invited individual developing country experts to participate in workshops on emergency management, timed to coincide with plenary meetings. Close coordination between the developing country contact group and the preparations of workshops is essential for the success of this programme.

My mandate as Chair of ISO/TC 223 runs out at the end of 2011. By then we will have a clear view of how ISO/TC 223 will contribute to the broad field of societal security. For me personally, the ISO journey, with its particular ground rules, traditions and highly professional players, has been an exceptionally rewarding experience. ■

### About the author



**Ambassador Krister Kumlin** has held series of positions within the Swedish Foreign Service, which he joined in 1962, including postings as ambassador to

Japan, Brazil and Greece. He is currently a senior adviser at the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and Chair of ISO/TC 223, *Societal security*.

