

CANENA - A Decade of Change

by Joel Solis

It was March 4, 2008 when CANENA held its 13th annual meeting in Cancun Mexico, famed as a low-cost Spring Retreat destination, providing an excellent atmosphere to practice renewal and transformation. 2008 was the year where the U.S. came close to economic collapse, with the Lehman Brothers Bankruptcy triggering a global recession. While the economy was in need of renewal, CANENA was well on its way. Having succeeded with the publication of ninety-eight (98) harmonized standards, CANENA moved forward in establishing a relationship with COPANT, began conducting joint outreach trade efforts with NEMA into Central and South America and signed cooperative agreements with IEC and CENELEC.

The CANENA Council's founders designed a voluntary process to harmonize electrotechnical safety requirements to remove technical barriers to trade while protecting health and safety of citizens in participating countries. Elimination or reduction of technical differences, coupled with the elimination of tariff barriers provided through the signing of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), nearly a quarter-century ago, was seen as a transformational event, lowering cost for all through mutually open market access. Anyone traveling to Canada, Mexico and the U.S. can attest to the benefits of open markets as evident by the numerous cross-border supply chains that have sprung up, the use of common installation practices and further deregulation of the energy industry sector. While NAFTA remains the longest enduring free trade agreement, the global economy has become more diversified with North American countries having forged ahead with numerous trade pacts on their own. Canada has 10 free trade agreements with 43 countries, Mexico has 10 with 45 countries, and the U.S. has 13 with 20 countries.

The most important article published in the 2008 CANENA Annual Report was the one titled "Fulfilling the Vision of the Founders". It warned that what was missing from the CANENA process was input from industry's

market strategists...a warning which is relevant today. The long and arduous evolution of the CANENA process and detailed technical deliberations surrounding the harmonization of electrotechnical standards is a success story to-date. But, the strategies necessary to deliver the full benefits, the vision of the founders, are not in place to respond to the changing market dynamics occurring regionally and globally do to the inclusion of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (the "TBT Agreement") in trade agreements which failed to provide a mechanism for designating regional standards as international standards.

The 2008 annual report noted that the majority of CANENA members are still largely focused on the technical aspects surrounding the standards of importance to their companies and funding organizations. They are generally not the business strategists that develop and execute market strategies and for most, even the history and original vision of CANENA to reduce the level of complexity inherent in designing electrical products for multiple markets is vague or lost. The same can be said today.

CANENA's members have continuously demanded that the Council's focus remain on its technical processes. CANENA's financial resources and in-kind contributions just support its technical program administration and its commercially neutral position is important to its relevance and complementary relationship in the region. Therefore, it is incumbent upon our members' funding organizations and trade associations to put to work, the harmonized standards as part of a regional open market strategy. Where in the past, lack of such a strategy can be seen as marginalizing the benefits of the harmonization work that has been accomplished, increasingly there is risk of closing markets in our region to North American standard products for the future.

2018 CANENA ANNUAL MEETING



CANENA Officers



2018 Annual General Meeting

This regional meetings attract the leading standards experts in building systems, commercial products, connected systems, industrial products, utility products and lighting systems. The objective of these meeting was to continue advancing regional electrotechnical product safety standards harmonization for equipment intended for the Americas by reducing technical barriers to trade caused by differing national conformity assessment and product installation criteria.



James E. Matthews III - Keynote Speaker

Mr. Matthews discussed the role of standards and conformity assessment in reducing barriers and growing markets, the role of CANENA and harmonization across the region, and the effects of NAFTA on the North American market.