

# Standards Oversight Council

## Companion Documents Sub-Committee Report

### July 10, 2001

#### Introduction

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Since well before the advent of the Standards Oversight Council, various kinds of *companion documents*<sup>1</sup> have been developed as guidance for technicians using conservation planning technical standards. Historically speaking, these accompanying documents have been created for a variety of reasons, housed in a number of different publications/locations, and referenced several different ways. Over time, multiple terms were being used to describe the same processes and documents, while the accessibility of these companion documents was limited by the fact that they were difficult to locate.

There are very practical reasons why such a heterogeneous approach was taken, but it has become apparent as the SOC process has expanded and evolved, that the time has come to establish some guidelines for those developing these documents and guidance for those wishing to use them. This acknowledgement of a problem coincided with the decision made by SOC to formally expand its area of responsibilities into educational initiatives intended to support the comprehension and usability of technical standards. In June 2001, a sub-committee was assembled to bring some clarity to this issue.

The sub-committee began with a number of questions and from there, they identified three key issues to be clarified and resolved within the SOC process:

- Identify the various kinds of companion documents that already exist and identify or state their purpose,
- Identify standardized terms, definitions and the publications in which they are located,
- Acknowledge and facilitate the evolving responsibilities of SOC work teams.

#### What is a Companion Document?

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At the most basic level, before any guidelines and standardized definitions for companion documents could be devised, the SOC sub-committee had to strip the process down to the basics. They began by compiling a list of the kinds of documents that have been developed to accompany technical standards in the past. It was agreed that ANY document, regardless of what form it might take, that is intended to supplement the information in a technical standard is to be considered a **companion document**.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Companion Document' is defined here as ANY document, regardless of type, that accompanies the publication of a technical standard in order to provide further guidance to the user of that technical standard. See section 'What is a Companion Document?' for further explanation.

Once the sub-committee had agreed upon the term that would be used to reference all documents accompanying technical standards, they then began to systematically categorize the various kinds of companion documents according to their purpose.

<b>Table 1. Companion Documents</b>			
<b>Planning Guidelines</b>	<b>Design Assistance</b>	<b>Standard Specific</b>	<b>Training &amp; Education</b>
Selecting BMPs	How-to-use the standard	Explanation of criteria	Supplemental training & educational products for standard
Provide background	Spreadsheets	Construction Specifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short-term training</li> </ul>
Applications in field conditions	Worksheets		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> </ul>
Special issues to be addressed such as resource/research protection	Standard engineering drawings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work team development</li> </ul>
	Reference data		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>

**Training & Education** for technical standards has thus far been considered beyond the scope of the SOC, but has since become a part of a new initiative for the Council. This initiative is intended to ensure technical standards are being used properly and that the people using them have access to additional assistance in terms of training materials. The SOC has already taken preliminary steps into the education and training realm by partnering with the University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX) in a new endeavor.

The UWEX has set aside funding to provide a half-time staff person devoted to the development of educational companion documents. In the fall of 2000, the UWEX undertook a companion document pilot project in order to determine what kinds of resources would be needed to produce these special documents.

In the future, the SOC will likely look to fostering stronger ties between SITCOM and ATCOM in the state so that training opportunities can be accommodated within existing technical training programs.

## **Standardizing Terms, Definitions and Publication Accessibility** \_\_\_\_\_

A further point of clarification remained for the Sub-committee; where and how should companion documents be referenced so that people can know how to find what they are looking for?

The table below represents a list of where companion documents have been filed in the past and where you can still find them. The table also lists the agencies responsible for the maintenance of these companion documents and the kinds of subjects one could

expect to find in each publication. Note that the title for any particular companion document refers not necessarily to the particular *kind* of document, but to the *publication* it can be found in.

<b>Types of Standards</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Companion Document Location</b>
Erosion Control, Urban	DNR	Wisconsin Construction Site Handbook (WDNR Blue Book)
Stormwater Control, Urban	DNR	Wisconsin Stormwater Manual (WDNR Green Book)
NRCS Resources (non-engineering practices)	NRCS	Technical Notes (NRCS Tech Notes)
Waste Management (related engineering practices)	NRCS	Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook (NRCS – AWMFH)
Engineering practices	NRCS	Engineering Field Handbook (NRCS – EFH)

## **Evolving Work Team Responsibilities**

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With the general terms standardized and some basic definitions defined to this point, it is necessary to allocate responsibilities and to account for particular technical considerations such as:

- Who develops these companion documents and how?
- Who retains custodianship duties, ie. who revises the companion documents?

### **Who develops the companion documents?**

The work team members are the most closely associated with the contents of the technical standards that they develop, so it would make sense that they continue to shoulder the primary responsibilities in terms of developing companion documents. The question becomes, can we make this process more productive, efficient and reliable? The SOC recognizes the hard work required in planning, developing and disseminating such documents, and so it has committed itself to providing some guidance for new work teams.

They will need to determine what is needed, what is already available, what is not, who is to take on the primary responsibility for the companion documents, and what form should they take. The companion document needs for any particular standard must be determined on a case-by-case basis. In some instances, no new information may need to be created, though it may be necessary to compile the sources into a more accessible package.

If the work team determines that they will need to develop a planning companion document of a significant nature whereby they feel it is necessary that they obtain some assistance, they must approach the SOC and/or the custodian of the standard to make a

request. This may mean that the UWEX and/or the custodian will become involved (ie. offer resource support).

The work teams will need to include the companion documents within the timeline of their work. The Sub-committee agreed that an outline/checklist to assist the work teams in deciding where the unmet needs are and what kinds of companion documents should be included in the handbook. In many cases, it will be necessary for the companion documents to be published and distributed at the same time as the technical standard, but this will not always be necessary and this will be left up to the discretion of the team leader/custodian. It was recommended that companion documents not fall under the same review process as the technical standards in order to preserve their flexibility.

### **SOC and Custodial Duties**

The status quo will remain in terms of the responsibilities retained by the custodians. The custodians will be responsible for housing, revising and maintaining the companion documents that they develop. It was decided that the companion documents would not be held to the same review process ascribed to by the technical standards in order to retain the working flexibility for those developing them (ie. the work teams and UWEX).

It was recommended that the companion documents become part of the larger SOC needs survey process, which means that SOC then assumes some measure of responsibility for the companion documents. The custodians would still maintain the responsibility for revisions of the companion documents.