

# ANSI Z535.6 – MANUALS IN FOCUS

By Erin Earley

In our last few “On Your Mark” columns, we’ve been putting a spotlight on the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z535 standards. This family of U.S. voluntary consensus standards was created to enhance safety communication and promote consistent hazard recognition and understanding – making it important for manufacturers and workplaces across the country. These standards create a guide for the design, application, and use of signs, colors, and symbols intended to identify and warn against hazards and for other accident prevention purposes. Our theme of exploring each of these standards individually continues, this month focusing on ANSI Z535.6 – Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions, and Other Collateral Materials.

## WHAT IS ANSI Z535.6?

ANSI Z535.6 is a standard developed by ANSI specifically focusing on the inclusion of safety information in product manuals and other related materials to enhance user understanding and safety. This standard – ANSI Z535.6 Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions, and Other Collateral Materials – provides guidelines for the design and location of product safety messages in collateral materials. Similar to the other ANSI Z535 standards, it’s intended to apply to a broad range of products.

The standard offers a communication system developed specifically for product safety information in collateral materials to help manufacturers, consumers, and the general public. It outlines requirements for collateral materials – which means information like owner manuals, user guides, instructions, maintenance or service manuals, and safety manuals – that accompany a product.

## THE STANDARDS ORIGIN – AND LATEST UPDATES

According to ANSI, “Historically, there has been a lack of widely available or generally applicable graphic systems for presenting safety information in product manuals,

instructions, and related materials. The absence of such systems, combined with the increased awareness and use of ANSI Z535.4 Standard for Product Safety Signs and Labels, has led to attempts to apply various aspects of ANSI Z535.4 to the presentation of safety information in collateral materials.” The issue: ANSI Z535.4 was created to apply specifically to product safety signs and labels, not to address collateral materials.

Collateral materials, while related to product safety signs and labels – with a need for cohesiveness between them – have many core differences from labels. That includes their overall purpose, content and depth of content, format, length, how they’re published or viewed, and the level of detail on safety messages. To respond to those differences, ANSI determined the need to develop a new Z535 standard to create a communication system designed specifically for product safety information in collateral materials.

In 2002, the ANSI Z535 committee voted to form a new subcommittee, ANSI Z535.6. According to ANSI, the purpose of the subcommittee was to develop a



An example of a best practice, ANSI Z535-formatted ‘Read Manual’ safety label; the label includes the ISO 7010, internationally-standardized symbol for “Refer to instruction manual/booklet”.

standard, “to complement the existing Z535 standards by addressing various aspects of the provision of safety information on collateral materials.”

The standard was published for the first time in 2006. Following that, revisions were made periodically, according to ANSI’s cycle, in 2011 and in 2017, when it was reaffirmed. The 2011 revision included an update to permit the use of the safety alert symbol in the middle of a line of text, as well as updates to several definitions (“accident”, “harm”, and “incident”), which were harmonized across the Z535 series to clearly define physical injury from other safety-related issues, like property damage.

Most recently, a revision to Z535.6 was made in late December 2023, along with updates to the ANSI Z535.4 and ANSI Z535.2 standards. The 2023 revision of Z535.6 incorporates minor clarifications. Notably, the definition of “risk” has been expanded, ensuring consistent understanding and application of this crucial concept. This refinement contributes to the standard’s efficacy in guiding effective safety messaging within product manuals, instructions, and other collateral materials. In addition, the German translation of the signal word “Notice” in Annex B was updated.

### USING THE STANDARDS’ GUIDELINES TO CREATE EFFECTIVE PRODUCT SAFETY INFORMATION

ANSI Z535.6 is intended to provide guidance to those creating collateral materials containing safety messages.

“The implementation of this standard can be complex. Like its other ANSI Z535 counterparts, .6 is intended to be a guide, not a prescriptive doctrine, and needs to be general enough to be able to be applied across a variety of products,” says Angela Lambert, ANSI Z535 committee member and head of standards compliance at Clarion Safety Systems. “In addition to that, developing an effective manual may include incorporating elements of the other ANSI Z535 standards, as well as finding

a way to harmonize with standards like ISO 20607: Safety of Machinery – Instruction Handbook – General Drafting Principles.”

While the standard does not specify what safety messages to include or what individual safety messages should say, it offers a variety of options for how to format messages. It does that by addressing four types of safety messages that are often present in collateral materials:

1. Supplemental directives: messages about other safety messages.
2. Grouped safety messages: messages that are collected or grouped in a document or section of a document focusing on safety information.
3. Section safety messages: messages that apply to entire sections, subsections, or multiple paragraphs or procedures within a document.
4. Embedded safety messages: messages that apply to a specific part of a section, paragraph, or procedure in a document.

The standard also discusses message components, as well as offers up a common design direction to provide product safety information in an orderly and consistent way. Many of the graphical elements used in the other ANSI Z535 standards are found in .6 – including signal words, the safety alert symbol, and safety colors – but are adapted for use in collateral materials.

“Understanding ANSI Z535.6 and unraveling how to apply it to a specific product and product manual, as well as alongside other national and international standards, may feel complex. However, it’s important to keep in mind where this standard came from – how it adapted out of a need for this level of specific information while working together with the original best practice Z535 standards – and how it can truly help to support a comprehensive and effective approach to hazard communication,” Lambert says. <sup>EN</sup>

Erin Earley, head of communications at Clarion Safety Systems, shares her company’s passion for safer products and workplaces. She’s written extensively about best practices for product safety labels and facility safety signs. Clarion is a member of the ANSI Z535 Committee for Safety Signs and Colors, the U.S. TAG to ISO/TC 145, and the U.S. TAG to ISO 45001. Erin can be reached at [earley@clarionsafety.com](mailto:earley@clarionsafety.com).

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