

Saudi Arabia

Overview

The [Saudi Arabian Standards Organization](#) (SASO) has about 20,500 standards, and is actively pursuing the promulgation of hundreds of new standards currently in various drafting stages of development. SASO has decided to adopt ISO 9000 as the approved standards for Saudi Arabia, and will act as an accreditation body through the Quality Assurance Department; nonetheless, SASO also adopts ASTM, UL, and NFPA standards, as well. Compliance will be on a voluntary basis. However, it would be prudent for American industry and services to consider this matter seriously in planning to do business in Saudi Arabia. There may be many cases where procurement agencies will insist on purchasing and placing orders only with those companies that are in compliance with ISO 9000, or the U.S. equivalent series.

Saudi Arabia is the most influential member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes five other countries in the Arabian Peninsula: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. As a group, the GCC is striving to create a common set of food standards, with the [Saudi Arabian Standards Organization](#) (SASO) as the lead agency. SASO is the only Saudi organization responsible for setting national standards for commodities and products, measurements, testing methods, meteorological symbols and terminology, commodity definitions, safety measures, and environmental testing, as well as other subjects approved by the organization's Board of Directors. While standards are set by SASO, the laboratories of the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry perform sample testing of all processed and packaged food items at various ports of entry. The [Saudi Ministry of Municipality and Rural Affairs](#) Environmental Control Department tests foodstuffs at points of sale for product safety standards. The [Communications and Information Technology Commission \(CITC\)](#) also has authority on imported telecommunications and IT products and services. Recently, the CITC has taken a more proactive role and has published a number of technical specifications relating to various products and services within its jurisdiction.

The [Saudi Food and Drug Authority](#) (SFDA) was established under the Council of Ministers resolution no (1) dated January 1, 2003, as an independent body that directly reports to the Prime Minister. The Authority objective is to ensure safety of food and drugs for humans and animals, and safety of biological and chemical substances as well as medical and electronic products. SFDA still does not have any jurisdiction.

Although SASO has an advisory, rather than executive role, it coordinates its activities among different executing agencies in the country to control product quality and standards. Saudi food standards are based mainly on *Codex Alimentarius* regulations and to some extent on European and U.S. standards but modified to reflect local conditions. Saudi Arabia's residential electric power system of 127/220 volts, 60 Hertz, is unique and has caused export problems for many American firms. However, SASO will accept electrical products as low as 120 volts, 60 Hertz.

Standards Organizations

The [Saudi Arabian Standards Organization](#) (SASO) is the Saudi Arabian entity that is in charge of developing and implementing standards. SASO is the Saudi organization responsible for setting national standards for commodities and

products, measurements, testing methods, meteorological symbols and terminology, commodity definitions, safety measures, and environmental testing, as well as other subjects approved by the organization's Board of Directors.

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The [Saudi Food and Drug Authority](#) will be responsible to regulate, oversee, and control food, drug, medical devices, as well as set mandatory standard specifications thereof, whether they are imported or locally manufactured. The control and/or testing activities can be conducted at the SFDA or any other agency's laboratories. Moreover, the SFDA is in charge of consumers' awareness on all matters related to food, drug and medical devices and associated other products and supplies.

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 <http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>.

Conformity Assessment

Since its inception in 1995, the certification program known as the ICCP was applicable to 66 regulated products. The purpose of the program was to insure consumer protection and that products entering Saudi Arabia conform to SASO standards. SASO was in charge of implementing and monitoring the International Conformity Certification Program (ICCP). They have done so through an agreement with Intertek, which has global presence.

Under its WTO commitments, Saudi Arabia will comply with all obligations under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade from the date of accession, and without recourse to any transition period. As such, Saudi Arabia has committed to remove the mandatory, pre-market approval requirements for imports (ICCP) and to implement a non-discriminatory, post-market surveillance mechanism applicable to both foreign and domestic product at no cost to suppliers. As of the date of this report, Saudi Arabia still mandates that a Certificate of Conformity (CoC) must accompany all consumer goods exported to the country. Exceptions include food products, medical products including medicines, medical equipment, and components/products of large industrial projects.

The [Ministry of Commerce and Industry](#) is responsible for the Certificate of Conformity (CoC) program under the jurisdiction of Dr. Hamad Al-Oufi, Director General for Quality Control & Inspection, who can be reached by phone at (+966-1) 401-3265 or by fax at (+966-1) 402-2539.

Product Certification

SASO has its own certification organization for locally manufactured products, as several SASO employees have been certified to work as professional auditors in conformance with ISO 9000 series standards.

For imported products, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry will implement the CoC program, which should be abolished under Saudi Arabia's WTO accession commitments.

For beef and poultry meat imported from the United States, Saudi Arabia has agreed to recognize a two-certificate approach: (1) an official FSIS export certificate issued for beef and poultry meat and (2) a producer or manufacturer self-certification to cover any additional requirements not related to food safety or animal health issues such as animal protein free feed declaration.

Moreover, the Kingdom's Government has also agreed that any maximum residue requirements for synthetic hormones in animal products would be consistent with international standards.

Accreditation

SASO is the only Saudi entity empowered to grant standards accreditation.

Publication of Technical Regulations

Final regulations are published in the official gazette of Saudi Arabia, *Umm al-Qurā*.

Labeling and Marking

Labeling and marking requirements are compulsory for any products exported to Saudi Arabia. The [Saudi Arabian Standards Organization](#) (SASO) is responsible for establishing labeling and other guidelines. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry implements SASO guidelines through its inspection and test laboratories at ports of entry.

Labeling is particularly important for companies marketing food products, personal care products, health care products, and pharmaceuticals. SASO has specific requirements for identifying marks and labels for various imported items. Labels must be in Arabic for any imported foodstuff item, which should basically reveal the same information on the container as in the foreign language, *i.e.*, ingredients, country of origin, manufacturer, shelf life, instructions for use, *etc.*

All food products, whether imported for commercial purposes, display, or for sampling, must be fit for human consumption and should meet established shelf life requirements. The product(s) must have a label or sticker showing the statutory information such as product name, country of origin, producer's name and address, production and expiry/use by dates, in Arabic and English languages (samples imported must be labeled at least in English).

It is vital that American exporters adhere to SASO quality standards and labeling regulations to avoid rejection of products at a Saudi port of entry. The method for writing production and expiry dates is to put the day of the month first, followed by month and year. Use of the system commonly followed in the United States, where the month is shown first, is not acceptable in Saudi Arabia. Products that do not meet established SASO standards are either re-exported to the country of origin or destroyed at the importer's expense.

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Companies can request a copy of the labeling requirements by contacting SASO by phone at (+966-1) 452-0132 or by fax at (+966-1) 452-0196. Arabic-language manuals must be included with any household electrical appliances exported to Saudi Arabia.

Quality-control laboratories at ports of entry may reject products that are in violation of existing standards and laws. In December 2005, Saudi Arabia implemented a voluntary shelf life standard (manufacturer-determined use-by dates) for most foodstuffs with the exception of selected perishable foods (fresh or chilled meat and poultry; fresh milk and fresh milk based products; margarine; fresh fruit juice; table eggs; and baby foods) that must meet SASO's established mandatory expiration periods. The revised standard (SASO 457/2005) will no longer ban imports of food products with less than half of its shelf life remaining.

American manufacturers are urged to discuss labeling requirements with their selected representative or distributor.

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Trade Agreements

Saudi Arabia is a member of the [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#), which consists of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Membership confers special trade and

investment privileges within those countries. The GCC implemented a Customs Union on January 1, 2003 that stipulates free movement of local goods within member states. Leaders of the GCC have approved to allow Yemen gradual entry into their Council. The member states also agreed that they would switch to a single currency by January 1, 2010 at the latest, which has not materialized as yet and the common market proposal is still being worked out. Saudi Arabia is also a member of the League of Arab States. Recently, the League has agreed to negotiate an Arab Free Trade Zone.

In 2003, the United States signed a TIFA agreement with Saudi Arabia. TIFAs are typically the initial venues for ongoing dialogue between the United States and foreign governments on economic reform and trade liberalization. The agreement promotes the establishment of legal protections for investors, improvements in intellectual property protection, more transparent and efficient customs procedures, and greater transparency in government and commercial regulations.

Web Resources	
U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security	www.bis.doc.gov/
Saudi Customs	www.customs.gov.sa/CustomsNew/default_E.aspx
Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO)	www.saso.org.sa/English/Pages/Default.aspx
GCC Patent Office	www.gccpo.org/e-INDEX.HTM
Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC)	www.citc.gov.sa/
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	www.commerce.gov.sa/english/
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	www.gcc-sg.org/home_e.htm