

THE TOOL YOU CAN USE

UL MARKS BY BOB MINKLE

What's behind all of the marks?

A collage of product certification marks brings the global economy to the electrical market.

Things just aren't the way they used to be in the electrical business. While the systems built and maintained have become increasingly complex, the expansion of a global marketplace has produced a need for product testing and certification more than ever before.

These days, products are often destined for multiple markets worldwide, so manufacturers will secure and display stamps of approval—otherwise known as “marks”—from numerous independent third-party testing laboratories and agencies to demonstrate their products' conformity with local requirements. And while this allows manufacturers greater flexibility in component production and distribution, contractors end up faced with a sometimes dizzying array of marks. In the end, contractors are not only consumed with ever-changing complexities on the job, they must also correctly select and install products bearing so many marks that they often look like something off the Nascar track.

In the not-too-distant past, things seemed simpler—from the drive to the local supplier to the installation of a particular piece of equipment. Then, only the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or Canadian Standards Association (CSA) marks typically appeared on products. Today, one must look a little closer to find the mark, or marks, the application requires. UL and CSA must share their space with a number of marks from other international standards agencies and testing laboratories. While indicating that a particular product has been tested and found to comply with the applicable standards, these marks also ensure products will perform as expected.

• **Underwriters Laboratories.** UL and its various marks are inarguably those most familiar in today's market. But even this mark has become more complicated, as there are now multiple UL marks to consider. Depending on a product's intended application, UL will grant different marks to indicate its successful testing and certification. The two most common UL marks are “UL listed” and “UL recognized.”

The UL-listed mark means that the entire product has passed the required standards and safety tests and has been found to operate according to the accepted requirements. UL-listed products are also manufactured under the UL follow-up services program, meaning that UL will periodically re-test random samples from a manufacturer's inventory to ensure that the product continues to comply with the standards and performs within the accepted levels of operation.

The UL-recognized mark is typically not seen by the end-user, as products bearing this mark are generally components of larger products that will later be tested as a whole in order to obtain a UL listing. It should be noted that the use of recognized components in a product will not ensure an automatic UL listing. While recognized components perform specific functions within end-use products, the complete final product must be tested as a unit to be successfully listed.

• **Canadian Standards Association.** The CSA mark is the other most recognizable certification found on products sold in North America. But this has also become slightly more complicated. In recent years both UL and CSA have instituted new types of Canadian product approvals using different marks. In the

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If a product carries the UL Listing mark (left), it means that UL found that representative samples of this product met UL's safety

requirements. Products with the C-UL Listing mark (right) have been evaluated to Canadian safety requirements, which may be somewhat different from U.S. safety requirements.



Consumers rarely see Recognized Component marks because they are specifically used on component parts that are part of a



larger product or system. These components may have restrictions on their performance or may be incomplete in construction. Products intended for Canada carry the Recognized Component mark “C.”



A CSA mark on its own, without indicators (left), means that the product is certified primarily for the Canadian market, to the applicable Canadian

standards. If a product has features from more than one area, (e.g., electrical equipment with fuel burning features), the mark indicates compliance to all applicable standards. A small, dark triangle appearing on the lower right-hand side of the CSA mark (right) indicates that a component is recognized by CSA.



The British Standards Institution mark, known as the Kitemark, is granted to manufacturers as proof of a product's compliance with standards endorsed by BSI.



The S mark is evidence that Intertek's ETL SEMKO division has independently tested and certified a product's

compliance to applicable European safety requirements. Intertek's ETL Listed mark is the legal equivalent of the UL Listed and CSA Listed marks throughout the United States and Canada.



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PRODUCT BLUEPRINT

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case of UL, the relatively new C-UL mark indicates that a product has been evaluated to the appropriate Canadian standards and has been deemed fit for sale in Canada. CSA has also added its own version of a recognized component mark; a small, dark triangle appearing on the lower right-hand side of the CSA Mark now indicates that a component is recognized by CSA.

• British Standards Institution (BSI).

The British Standards Institution started out as an Engineering Standards Committee in 1901 and gradually developed into the first national standards institution in the world. Like other organizations, BSI works with the IEC and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to harmonize world standards. The British Standards Institution mark—known as the Kitemark—is granted to manufacturers as proof of a product's compliance with standards endorsed by BSI.

• **International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).** Founded in London in 1906, the IEC proposed the development of global standards for the purpose of promoting international trade. Although the IEC is not a certifying body, the use of IEC standards helps to remove barriers to international trade. With more than 50 countries participating as members, the IEC is now considered the worldwide authority for standards in the electrotechnical field.

• **Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI).** Formed in Japan in 1949 to provide postwar government leadership and assistance to industry, MITI's major objective was originally to strengthen the postwar Japanese industrial base. In 2001 MITI reorganized to become the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). MITI/METI actively participates in the development of industry standards, including those for electrical products.

• **Svenka Elektriska Materielkontrollanstalten AB (SEMKO).** Founded by Swedish engineers in 1925 to improve the safety of electrical products, SEMKO was purchased by Intertek Group in 1995 and combined with its Electrical Testing Laboratories (ETL) to become ETL

Find out more

British Standards Institution (BSI):
www.bsi-global.com

Canadian Standards Association (CSA): www.csa-international.org/certification_marks

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC):
www.iec.ch

Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI):
www.miti.gov.my

Svenka Elektriska Materielkontrollanstalten AB (SEMKO):
www.etlsemko.com

Underwriters Laboratories (UL):
www.ul.com/mark

SEMKO. In addition to product safety and performance testing and certification, ETL SEMKO provides other services such as quality management systems registration. ETL SEMKO grants the S Mark to ensure products destined for the European Union comply with applicable safety requirements.

Obviously, many of these organizations have been around for a long time—but with the arrival of a global economy, more and more of these international organizations and product certification marks are showing up. The good news is that the harmonization of international electrical standards is already well underway, but it will likely be years before the world's standards organizations will collectively arrive at a common ground—and perhaps a common mark. In the meantime, we're left to observe these happenings with interest, continue with business, and enjoy all the artwork on the products used on a daily basis. ■■■

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