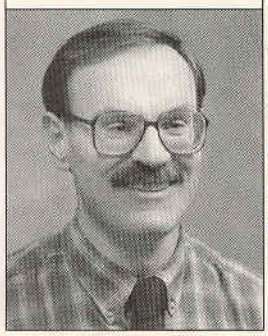
# Standards on Postage Stamps

## An Interesting Subject for Topical Stamp Collectors

by Donald W. Hillger



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Numerous postage stamps have been issued to publicize standards topics. The most frequently seen topic includes an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) theme. With the inauguration of World Standards Day in 1970 (Oct. 14), stamps have been issued on this date in many succeeding years to support this ISO function. Another category of postage stamps includes those recognizing national standards organizations or standards ordinances in various countries. These national standards organizations perform standardization activities in their respective countries.

Two standards-related topics have been commemorated on a limited number of postage stamps. One is the introduction of time zones and standard time in the late 1800s. This includes stamps commemorating the centenary of the Greenwich Meridian and the International Date Line. Related to, but preceding, time zone standardization was the use of the Gregorian Calendar, commemorated by stamps issued in 1982 on its 400th anniversary.

Finally, postage stamps have been issued publicizing the conversion from left-hand to right-hand driving. Driving customs, not normally recognized as standards, make an interesting topic for stamps, as several countries have switched driving customs in order to conform to the custom in surrounding countries.

This article will focus on the above themes on postage stamps. A related topic is world standardization on the International System of Units (SI), or the metric system. That theme has been covered by the author in a previous article showing stamps from over 30 countries which have chosen to publicize their conversion to the metric system.[1] A similar article about metric stamps was written by a Canadian educator.[2]

### The International Organization for Standardization

The dominant standardization topic on postage stamps is that of ISO, which was formed in 1946 to unite many national standards organizations and to promote standardization worldwide. Presently, ISO comprises the national standards bodies of 90 countries,[3] covering standardization in all fields except electrical and electronic engineering standards, which are the responsibility of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). Although formed under the initiative of a United Nations (UN) war-time committee, ISO is not officially associated with the UN.[4]

The first known stamp with an ISO theme was issued in 1961 by Finland (**No. 1**) to commemorate the 5th General Assembly of the ISO member countries held in Helsinki. The Finland stamp shows a circle, a symbol which will be seen on many other standards stamps. ISO General Assemblies are held every three years. The next (6th) triennial meeting of member nations, held in New Delhi in 1964, was commemorated by a stamp from India (**No. 2**). The India stamp shows the world, a caliper, and in the lower right corner, the acronym ISI for the India Standards Institution, a member body of ISO.

The 7th ISO General Assembly occurred in 1967 in Moscow. Again the host country, this time the Soviet Union, issued a stamp (**No. 3**) to publicize the international congress held at Moscow State Univ., shown on the left side of the stamp. On the right side is a construction crane, and in the center is a large circle. After three years the 8th ISO General Council met in Ankara, with Turkey issuing two commemorative stamps (**Nos. 4-5**) of different denominations and colors. The main symbol on each stamp is a Hittite sun disk, with three smaller circles within the main circle.

### World Standards Day

In 1970, ISO established World Standards Day.[5,6] This event was to be celebrated annually on Oct. 14 to call attention to standardization in general and to world standardization in particular. The date marks the day in 1946 when delegates from 25 countries established ISO to facilitate the coordination and unification of industrial standards.[7]


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The first country to issue a stamp to commemorate World Standards Day was Egypt, in 1970 (**No. 6**). Besides marking the first annual World Standards Day, the stamp also commemorated the 25th anniversary of ISO. This is the first stamp to show a new ISO emblem, a sphere on which is printed the ISO acronym. In the center of the Egypt stamp are a flattened sphere and a cogwheel. The cogwheel will appear on several other standards stamps. Sudan also commemorated the first World Standards Day, but its stamps (**Nos. 7-9**) did not appear until two years later, in 1972. Sudan's three stamps of different denominations and colors are very similar to the stamp issued by Egypt, with the flattened sphere and the cogwheel in the center. However, to the left is a World Standards Day emblem consisting of four circles, the lowest of which appears to be the ISO sphere without the ISO inscription. Above the circles are the words "World Standards Day," and below the circles is the date. Note the ascending day-month-year order (14 October 1970), which is the common way of writing dates outside of the United States and Canada. Also on the right side of each stamp is the acronym SSO, for the Sudanese Standards Organization, the national organization representing Sudan in ISO.

In 1974, Egypt issued a second stamp (**No. 10**), this time for the 5th World Standards Day. This stamp contains many of the symbols found on Egypt's first stamp, including the ISO sphere and a portion of a cogwheel, as well as a caliper. Kuwait followed in 1975 with two stamps (**Nos. 11-12**) commemorating the 6th World Standards Day. Again, the ISO sphere is shown, this time over an anchor and a tape measure. Kuwait is a correspondent member of ISO, not a full member body, being that Kuwait does not have its own national standards organization. The next three stamps (**Nos. 13-15**) were issued by Libya on World Standards Day in 1977. On the left side of each stamp is a coat of arms; on the right side an expanded World Standards Day emblem. None of the printing on the stamps is in English, but the date below the World Standards Day emblem is written in descending year-month-day (1977-10-14) form. This is the order recommended by ISO for all-

numeric dates.[8] The descending numerical order is the most logical form and avoids the possibility of confusion between the ascending day-month-year order the mixed month-day-year form used in the United States.

All the World Standards Day stamps were issued by middle-eastern countries until 1977, when the Republic of China (Taiwan) issued two brightly colored stamps of different denominations (**Nos. 16-17**) on World Standards Day. These Chinese stamps are a break from the middle-eastern style. The main symbol on each stamp is a huge Chinese quality mark. In the background are many items relating to industry standards. Also in 1977, Syria issued its first World Standards Day stamp (**No. 18**). Besides the ISO sphere, there is a ruler. The ruler and tape measure have been shown on some of the previously-mentioned stamps and will appear on other stamps to follow. The following year, 1978, Iraq issued three stamps (**Nos. 19-21**) to commemorate the 9th World Standards Day. Each stamp has the World Standards Day emblem and a ruler on top of the outline of Iraq.

Nigeria issued two stamps in 1980 (**Nos. 22-23**) for the 11th World Standards Day. These stamps have a much simpler design than the stamps from the middle-eastern nations. Both stamps have the World Standards Day emblem. The first stamp shows a metric ruler with centimetre divisions and a metric scale calibrated in kilograms. The second Nigerian stamp shows a laboratory technician performing quality control. Ethiopia followed in two years with five stamps (**Nos. 24-28**) on World Standards Day in 1982. The first four stamps have alternating length and mass themes; the fifth stamp contains the emblem of the Ethiopian Standards Institution (ESI), a three-lobed symbol, which is shown to be displayed on various packages. Also on each stamp is the World Standards Day emblem with the date below the emblem in the ISO-recommended all-numeric format.

In 1982, Saudi Arabia issued a World Standards Day stamp (**No. 29**). Like the Libya stamps, none of the printing is in English, but the World Standards Day emblem and a portion of a cogwheel are evident. Syria issued its


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second and third standardization stamps (**Nos. 30-31**) on World Standards Day in 1983. The stamps have a modern appearance, with buildings and a factory on the first stamp and a circle and symbols on the second stamp. The World Standards Day and ISO emblems are shown, and dates are in the ISO descending-order format. The acronym SASMO stands for the Syrian Arab Organization for Standardization and Metrology, a member body of ISO. The last known World Standards Day commemorative stamp (**No. 32**) was issued in 1985 by Iran. In the center is a large sphere with a portion of a cogwheel on the right side, and the World Standards Day and ISO emblems below. The symbol in the very center is the acronym ISIRI, for the Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran, an ISO member body. No stamps with ISO or World Standards Day themes are known to have been issued by western hemisphere nations.

### National Standards Organizations and Ordinances

Other types of standardization stamps do not recognize ISO or World Standards Day in particular. Rather, they commemorate standardization efforts within particular countries. The first stamp in this category is from Korea (**No. 33**). This 1971 stamp marks the 10th anniversary of industrial standardization in Korea. On the right side of this colorful stamp is a large slide caliper and on the left side is a KS emblem, apparently used in Korea's standardization efforts. The Korean Bureau of Standards (KBS) is a member body of ISO. In 1972, India issued a stamp (**No. 34**) to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Indian Standards Institution (ISI). The stamp shows a plumb bob and in the lower right corner is the ISI acronym buried between the digits of the number 25. As previously mentioned, ISI is a member body of ISO.

The next stamp (**No. 35**), from Australia, was issued in 1976 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO). This government agency does basic and applied scientific research for Australia. However, CSIRO is not the national organization representing Australia in the ISO. The stamp shows a hand holding a striped survey rule, a graph, and a punched computer tape. The punched paper tape is now a fairly antiquated item in the rapidly-changing area of computer technology. The stamp from Brazil (**No. 36**), also issued in 1976, publicizes the Brazilian Association of Technical Norms, which goes by the Portuguese acronym ABNT. ABNT, founded in 1940, is the official member body representing Brazil at international standardization meetings.

Taking items in chronological order, in 1979, Poland issued a postcard (**No. 37**) to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Polish Measurement Service. This is the only known standardization postcard. Since postcards are not listed in stamp catalogs, such items

are not easily discovered. The "stamp" on the postcard has a metric theme, with a large SI symbol. Around the border of the stamp are the seven SI base units. (This item should have been included in the author's previous article on the metric system on postage stamps, but the postcard had not been located at that time.[1])

In 1982, Switzerland issued a stamp (**No. 38**) showing a micrometer. The stamp celebrates the centenary of the Machine Manufacturers Association. Such associations are typically formed to promote standardization. Switzerland is a member of ISO. The last two stamps in this category have been issued by northern European countries. Denmark's stamp (**No. 39**) shows a primitive beam balance to commemorate the 1983 300th anniversary of a weights and measures ordinance. The stamp from The Netherlands (**No. 40**) marks the 1986 300th anniversary of the Amsterdam datum ordinance. The data in this case are elevations similar to the North American Datum giving elevation standards used in the United States. Shown on the Netherlands stamp is an elevation gauge and a surveyor. Both Denmark and The Netherlands have standards organizations which are member bodies of ISO.

### Time Zones and Standard Time

A standard which most people take for granted is standard time. Time zones and standard time are tied to the longitude as determined from some prime meridian. The choice of the meridian through the Greenwich Observatory in England was due in large part to the Greenwich Meridian being the most recognized of over ten other initial meridians in use at that time for navigational purposes.[9,10] The decision in favor of Greenwich was made at the International Meridian Conference held in Washington, DC, in October 1884. This, however, was merely a recommendation to the governments attending the conference, with various countries adopting the recommendation at different times.

Stamps marking the centenary of the Greenwich Meridian were issued by Great Britain in 1984 (**Nos. 41-44**). Each of the four stamps shows the Greenwich Meridian in red, but on a different scale. The first stamp shows a view of the earth with the Greenwich Meridian cutting north-south across Europe and Africa. The second stamp gives smaller detail with the prime meridian cutting through an old map of England and France. The third stamp shows the prime meridian through an aerial view of the Greenwich Observatory, and the fourth stamp shows the Greenwich Meridian bisecting a drawing of the transit telescope used for astronomical observations. This telescope is used to clock the passage or transit time of various stars as they cross the prime meridian.[10]


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Along with the choice of the Greenwich Meridian there is a line at 180° longitude called the International Date Line, roughly bisecting the Pacific Ocean. On either side of the International Date Line the date is different. The need for a change in date was recognized by the first circumnavigators of the earth.[9,11] When these explorers arrived back at their starting points, they had either gained or lost a day depending on whether they traveled westward or eastward around the world. The International Date Line solves this problem by specifying

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where the date changes. There is an advantage having the International Date Line in the sparsely-populated Pacific Ocean where the change in date affects few people. However, if the International Date Line was kept strictly at 180° longitude, it would bisect groups of islands such as Fiji. Various island groups have chosen to keep the same time on all islands within the group, and as a result the International Date Line has some deviations from the anti-prime meridian. The International Date Line therefore expresses geographically the difference in date which exists among the island groups in the Pacific Ocean.

Of the island groups near the anti-prime meridian only Tonga is known to have commemorated on stamps the centenary, in 1984, of the International Date Line. Four stamps have been issued, two from Tonga (**Nos. 45-46**), and two from Tin Can Island (**Nos. 47-48**), the northernmost of the larger islands in the Tonga archipelago. Tin Can Island got its nickname from a unique method of mail delivery, with incoming mail sealed inside large biscuit tins dropped by passing ships.[12] All four stamps show the International Date Line in red on either a globe or a map of the surrounding area in the South Pacific. The International Date Line has a 7.5° (half-hour) jog to the east, putting Tonga on its west and making Tonga among the first island groups to experience a new day. Thus the inscription "where time begins" on Tonga's stamps. Shown on the Tonga stamps are two men: George Airy,[10] pioneer of the Greenwich Meridian; and Sandford Fleming,[13-16] a time zone pioneer. Tonga is also famous among stamp collectors for its self-adhesive stamps on a perforated paper backing, unlike the perforated stamps from most countries.

The last two stamps in the area of time zones and standard time are from Japan, which adopted standard time in 1886. The first stamp (**No. 49**) was issued in 1961 to mark the 75th anniversary of Japanese standard time. The stamp shows the meridian on the earth which determines Japan's time zone. Again in 1986, Japan issued a stamp (**No. 50**) to commemorate the centenary of Japanese standard time. On this stamp a meridian is shown cutting north-south across Japan and a clock shows an even hour on this meridian.

### Calendar Reform

Another standard relating to time is a standard way of counting days with a calendar. Prior to our present calendar, the Julian Calendar in use had fallen behind celestial time in counting days because of too many leap years. In 1582, the Gregorian Calendar was established by Pope Gregory XIII to bring the calendar back into sync with the earth's orbit around the sun, so that the seasons would not drift from year to year.[17] The new calendar also required ten days to be dropped from the old calendar to make up for past deficiencies. Those ten days were deleted between Oct. 4 and Oct. 15 of that year. As in the case of standard time, the new calendar was not adopted uniformly. Adoption dates varied, with Great Britain accepting the new calendar in 1752 when the difference between the old and the new calendars was then eleven days (one additional leap year). The last countries to make the change did so early in the 20th Century, over 300 years after the Gregorian Calendar was first used.

Two countries issued stamps in 1982 to mark the 400th anniversary of the Gregorian Calendar. West Germany's stamp (**No. 51**) shows a calendar illustration dating from the era of calendar reform, Germany being one of the first countries to make the change. Vatican City, as a sovereign state which issues its own stamps, printed a souvenir sheet containing three stamps (**Nos. 52-54**). The sheet gives the two adjacent dates in October which mark the ten days omitted in 1582; the text is in Latin. The three embedded stamps show sculpture details from the tomb of Pope Gregory XIII in the Vatican Basilica.

### Introduction of Right-Hand Driving

The final standards topic covered in this article is that of automobile driving customs. The world is divided into countries where people drive on the right side of the road and countries where people drive on the left side of the road. Origins of these driving customs are not entirely clear,[18-20] but their spread is easier to understand. France brought right-hand driving to much of Europe, while Great Britain spread its left-hand driving to its empire, except for the United States and Canada. Most of the countries where people drive on the left, except for Japan, do so due to their British heritage. In contrast, most South Americans drive on the right, as well as people in the Soviet Union and China.

There are instances where countries have switched driving customs. For example, Okinawa changed from right-hand to left-hand driving after rejoining Japan;[21] Okinawa had driven on the right since World War II. All stamps known to publicize the change in driving customs are from countries that have switched from left-hand to right-hand driving.

In 1967, Sweden changed to right-hand driving on Sept. 3 to conform to the custom in surrounding countries. Sweden's stamps (**Nos. 55-58**) show the road as seen through the windshield of a car driving on the right-hand side of the road. The four stamps are all identical except for denomination and perforation, two stamps with vertical perforation and two stamps with horizontal perforation, unlike most stamps which are perforated on all sides.

Like Sweden, Iceland switched to right-hand driving one year later, on May 26, 1968. Iceland's two stamps (**Nos. 59-60**) show traffic using the right side of the road. It is unusual for an island nation such as Iceland, with no adjacent neighbors, to switch from driving on one side of the road to the other. Many other countries have changed because they are surrounded by other countries with right-hand driving. For example, Sierra Leone changed to right-hand driving on March 1, 1971 to conform to surrounding countries in western Africa. Sierra Leone's stamps (**Nos. 61-62**) show crossed arrows indicating the change over from left-hand to right-hand driving. These two stamps, which are self-adhesive like the stamps from Tonga, are irregular in shape. Another west African nation, Nigeria, switched to right-hand driving, in April 2, 1972; Nigeria's four stamps (**Nos. 63-66**) use arrows to show traffic flow, especially at intersections.

Likewise, Ghana changed to right-hand driving on Aug. 4, 1974 to conform to surrounding countries. Ghana's five stamps (**Nos. 67-71**) are similar in design to the stamps from Nigeria, with arrows indicating traffic flow. In addition, hands are used to indicate right-hand driving. All of these formerly-British left-hand driving nations in west Africa have changed to right-hand driving, with the change taking place in the 1970s. In general, there is a worldwide trend away from a mixed geographical pattern of nations with different driving customs and toward a pattern of larger blocks of adjoining nations with right-hand and left-hand driving customs.[22]

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The last four stamps (**Nos. 72-75**) on driving customs were issued by Yemen in 1977, showing policemen directing traffic. Yemen changed to right-hand driving on Jan. 2, 1977, about ten years after gaining independence from Great Britain. Again, the change was to conform to other nations on the Arabian Peninsula. It is also interesting to note that the change in driving customs is not a voluntary change. Everyone within the country is required to change at one time. All countries mentioned here have chosen specific dates for the change. This is unlike conversion to the metric system, where the transition may be voluntary; or even if the change is mandatory, the transition takes place over a period of years or even decades.


**Summary**

This article covers several standards topics as displayed on postage stamps. Table 1 lists each of the stamps in the order of their discussion. Stamps are a valuable medium for commemorating or publicizing various standards themes, making them a useful educational tool when public acceptance is important. Topics which have been seen on stamps range from international and national standards organizations, to industrial standards, to standards for counting time (time zones, standard time, and calendars), and finally to driving customs. If readers know of additional standards-related postage stamps or postal items, the author would appreciate learning about them. **SN**



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## Table 1—Identification and Description of Postage Stamps

| Stamp No. | Issuing Country | Scott[23] Cat.No. | Year of Issue | Reason for Issue/Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **International Organization for Standardization (ISO) General Assemblies** | | | | |
| 1 | Finland | 383 | 1961 | 5th General Assembly ISO, Helsinki |
| 2 | India | 392 | 1964 | 6th General Assembly ISO, New Delhi |
| 3 | U.S.S.R. | 3309 | 1967 | 7th General Assembly ISO, Moscow |
| 4-5 | Turkey | 1863-1864 | 1970 | 8th General Assembly ISO, Ankara |
| **ISO World Standards Day—Oct. 14** | | | | |
| 6 | Egypt | 840 | 1970 | 1st World Standards Day |
| 7-9 | Sudan | 245- 247 | 1972 | 1st World Standards Day (1970) |
| 10 | Egypt | 963 | 1974 | 5th World Standards Day |
| 11-12 | Kuwait | 636- 637 | 1975 | 6th World Standards Day |
| 13-15 | Libya | 708- 710 | 1977 | 8th World standards Day |
| 16-17 | Taiwan | 2066-2067 | 1977 | 8th World Standards Day |
| 18 | Syria | 789 | 1977 | 8th World Standards Day |
| 19-21 | Iraq | 868- 870 | 1978 | 9th World Standards Day |
| 22-23 | Nigeria | 394- 395 | 1980 | 11th World Standards Day |
| 24-28 | Ethiopia | 1050-1054 | 1982 | 13th World Standards Day |
| 29 | Saudi Arabia | 852 | 1982 | 13th World Standards Day |
| 30-31 | Syria | 988- 989 | 1983 | 14th World Standards Day |
| 32 | Iran | 2200 | 1985 | 16th World Standards Day |
| **National Standards Organizations and Ordinances** | | | | |
| 33 | Korea | 803 | 1971 | 10th Anniv. Korean Bureau of Standards |
| 34 | India | 552 | 1972 | 25th Anniv. India Standards Institution |
| 35 | Australia | 636 | 1976 | 50th Anniv. CSIRO |
| 36 | Brazil | 1492 | 1976 | Brazil Assoc. Technical Norms |
| 37 | Poland | postcard | 1979 | 60th Anniv. Polish Measurement Service |
| 38 | Switzerland | 736 | 1982 | Centenary Machine Manufacturers Assoc. |
| 39 | Denmark | 740 | 1983 | 300th Anniv. Wghts & Measures Ord. |
| 40 | Netherlands | 677 | 1986 | 300th Anniv. Amsterdam Datum Ord. |
| **Time Zones and Standard Time** | | | | |
| 41-44 | Great Britain | 1058-1061 | 1984 | Centenary Greenwich Meridian |
| 45-46 | Tonga | 586- 587 | 1984 | Centenary International Date Line |
| 47-48 | Tin Can Island | 8405-8406 | 1984 | Centenary International Date Line |
| 49 | Japan | 732 | 1961 | 75th Anniv. Japanese Standard Time |
| 50 | Japan | 1676 | 1986 | Centenary Japanese Standard Time |
| **Calendar Reform (Gregorian Calendar)** | | | | |
| 51 | West Germany | 1383 | 1982 | 400th Anniv. Gregorian Calendar |
| 52-54 | Vatican City | 717a | 1982 | 400th Anniv. Gregorian Calendar |
| **Publicity for Change to Right-Hand Driving** | | | | |
| 55-58 | Sweden | 733- 736 | 1967 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, Sept. 3 |
| 59-60 | Iceland | 397- 398 | 1968 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, May 26 |
| 61-62 | Sierra Leone | 415,C131 | 1971 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, March 1 |
| 63-66 | Nigeria | 280- 283 | 1972 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, April 2 |
| 67-71 | Ghana | 530- 534 | 1974 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, Aug. 4 |
| 72-75 | Yemen | 174- 177 | 1977 | Change to Right-Hand Driving, Jan. 2 |