

Tarja Tolvanen (STD): Welcome and introduction to the 4th European colloquium for user-friendly product information

I would like to welcome you all to the 4th annual European Colloquium for user friendly documentation.

Today, as for the past 2 colloquiums, TCeurope – the European organization for national technical writing societies – is hosting the colloquium.

We are again happy to facilitate the meeting of people from different backgrounds, different disciplines and different viewpoints.

As a representative of TCeurope, this is a very positive day also as after the Annual General Meeting held yesterday here in Brussels, we have been able to extend the membership of TCeurope to 2 new countries.

Currently, TCeurope comprises of national societies from the following EU countries:

Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, and the new members – Italy, and Sweden. In addition to these countries, TCeurope is looking to support the creation of further national societies.

The current member countries represent a national membership of approximately 6500 technical communications specialists, and we are very happy to see that the recognition of the importance – and of the existence of technical communication – is increasing rapidly.

All around Europe companies and technical communicators are struggling on a daily basis with creating accurate, high quality documentation that complies to industry regulations and best practises, and that supports the users of products so that they get the best use of the equipment they have purchased – safely.

Access to regulatory guidelines and information on what is required of technical documentation varies from country to country and also depends on issues like

- The size of the company the writers work for
- The industry the writers work in
- The cooperation between the legal departments and R&D departments
- And many other factors.

Technical communication as a discipline is still developing and there has been a need for a guideline that gives support and information on several levels;

- On management level to create an understanding on legal aspects of product documentation and of what is required in the product development cycle
- On technical writing (and illustration) level on what is required to create safe and user-friendly document
- And to all to create a full understanding of the technical writing process and of the several links to existing European directives, laws and guidelines.

The SecureDoc guideline that is the topic of discussion today, is the first European Union funded programme run by TCeurope that has come to its fruition. The programme will officially finish on May 11th 2004, and the guideline will then be available in 11 European languages.

This guideline has required a lot of work and input from technical writing societies and consumer societies. It has been very good to be able to work from the point of views of the consumers as well as the professional creating the documents, to create this guideline.

We hope that today will be a good starting point in the dissemination of the SecureDoc guideline and that this day will also give us new ideas and new contacts that help us develop technical communication even further on a European level.