

REPORT OF ENGINEERING DIRECTOR, TELEVISION

Peter Symes

The work of the Television Technology Committees continues to expand in both volume and scope. Last year more than 20 new SMPTE Television Standards were approved, and another 15 are in the final stages of the process. Today, more than 50 documents are at various stages in the committee process.

There are now eight Technology Committees, briefly detailed below.

V16 covers Video Recording and Reproduction Technology, and is chaired by Neil Neubert, JVC. This committee is processing documentation of several new compressed VTR formats.

S22 is the Systems Committee. This group, chaired by Merrill Weiss, Merrill Weiss Associates, addresses issues common to the television system as a whole. This can include very specific topics, such as reference signals, and the structuring of complex systems that may require documentation from several other committees.

I23, chaired by David Bancroft of Philips (soon to be Thomson) Broadcast, deals with image formats and related issues, perhaps the work most traditionally associated with the television technology committees.

C24 works on compression standards for video. David Fibush, a consultant, chairs this large group.

W25 is about wrappers—file formats and metadata for all the data representations created by the other committees. It is chaired by Oliver Morgan, Avid.

N26 is the committee on networking and file management, and is chaired by Hans Hoffmann of the European Broadcasting Union.

D27 is concerned with “data essence.” This is data that forms a part of program content, usually to accompany audio and video. Johann Safar, Panasonic, chairs this committee.

A29 is the newly created committee for television audio, and will be chaired by Steven Lyman, Dolby.

The Television Technology Committees meet together in a weeklong session, four times each year. Most of the meeting cycles have been held in the U.S., but in recognition of the growing importance of the SMPTE standards activities to television organizations throughout the world, we have started holding some cycles in other locations. In September 1999 and September 2000 meeting cycles were held immediately following the International Broadcasting Convention. The 1999 meetings were held in Geneva and were hosted by the European Broadcasting Union, and in 2000 the British Broadcasting Corp. hosted our meetings at its training facility in Wood Norton, England.

This year we take another important step. Our colleagues from Japan have always been enthusiastic and hardworking contributors to the standards process, and have always suffered the necessary travel. In March 2001 we held a meeting cycle in Japan for the first time, as guests of the Broadcast Systems Div. of Matsushita Electric in Osaka.

Our meeting cycles are usually hosted by companies in or close to the industry. We have a few “regulars” who have hosted many meeting cycles, and more who have helped on one or two occasions. However, we prefer not to impose too much on the generosity of any



one organization and are always looking for companies willing to host the meetings. We require meeting rooms space for about 80 people, so the number of suitable locations is limited. If you are interested in hosting or funding a meeting cycle, please contact Mark Hyman at SMPTE headquarters; he will be happy to discuss details.

One of the major problems of standards work is that many organizations cannot afford to devote one or more qualified people for four weeks each year. Some participants have interests in only part of the activities, and we try to arrange the schedule so that they do not need to attend all the meetings. However, this is only a partial solution, and it is still not possible to get all the participation we need, particularly from the user community, at the physical meetings.

Although we continue to believe that in-person meetings play an important role, we have to increase the amount of work accomplished electronically. The meeting venues are now always equipped with a server and network connections for all participants. Between meetings, discussions continue using e-mail reflectors and the SMPTE FTP site. All balloting is now conducted electronically, and work is under way to enhance substantially the capabilities of the website.

We have also divided committee membership into two main categories. Participating members are normally expected to attend most of the physical meetings, and must respond to committee ballots to permit us to meet due process obligations. Observer members participate on an at-will basis. They receive all electronic communications, including ballots, and have access to all the in-process documentation, but have no obligation to participate at any given level. Any contributions they offer will be considered, and any objection raised by an observer member must be addressed in the same way, and with the same diligence, as if it came from a participating member.

Nevertheless, participation levels, timeliness, and efficiency continue to be challenges. The standards activities are of vital importance to all industry organizations, manufacturers and users. We need the participation of your experts, and we welcome all suggestions to improve our processes and performance.