

Blue pencil



2003/2004 STC Publications Competition Results

by Heather Lum, Competition Manager

This year, the Pittsburgh chapter held Technical Publications, Online Communications, and Technical Art competitions. We received 27 entries, many from Pittsburgh-area companies as well as entries from other states including Florida, New Jersey, and Tennessee. Entries covered a wide variety of subjects ranging from cell phones and video-telephone devices to drug inventory management, management decision-making, data security, and genetic research.

In addition to providing our chapter with an opportunity to recognize outstanding work, the competition is an important source of income. Competition entry fees generated over \$2,000 for STC, Pittsburgh's treasury in 2003/2004.

Special thanks go to the STC members and other professionals who volunteered to judge the chapter's competition. The judges were a highly competent group spanning many professions, including technical communication, training, engineering, art and graphic design, and information development.

The Online Communications judges were Nancy Carpenter (GENCO), Alan Houser (Group Wellesley), Marlene Miller and Ray Janicko (Pa. Association of Notaries), Chris Keefer (DDI, Inc.), Roselyn Kline (freelance), John Lum (National Instruments), Nancy Ott (Evoxis), and Beverly Spagnolo (Klauscher Architects).

The Technical Art judges were Greg Harrison and Todd Pinkham (California

University), and Frank Longo, Frank Palmer, and John Serafini (TenUnited).

We exchanged our chapter's Technical Publications entries with North East Ohio STC for its Online Communications entries. As in the past, exchanging entries offered a fresh perspective from a judging standpoint, as well as the chance to work with another STC chapter.

Competition winners and judges will be honored at the chapter awards banquet on June 15, 2004. Competition entries will also be on display, so plan to attend and take a look.

Award winners in the STC, Pittsburgh chapter-level competitions

Of the 19 entries which won awards in the STC, Pittsburgh chapter-level competition, four were eligible for submission to the International Publications Competition. (See the chart on page 3.)

After chapter-level judging was completed in December, the four entries that received Distinguished awards went on to compete at the international level:

- *Beyond the Human Genome Project*, submitted by Oak Ridge National Laboratory to the Technical Publications Competition, Informational Materials category. This entry was recognized for an Excellence award at the International Publications Competition.
- *Notary Notes*, submitted by the Pennsylvania Association of Notaries to the Technical Publications Competition,

Newsletter category. Notary Notes also won Best of Show in Pittsburgh's chapter-level competition.

- *Safeguards and Security Billboard*, submitted by BWXY-12 to the Technical Art Competition, Promotional Poster Design category
- *ServiceOn Data*, submitted by Marconi Communications to the Technical Publications Competition, Documentation Kits category

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Blue Pencil

Blue Pencil is the official newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Pittsburgh chapter. It is published monthly from September through June by the Pittsburgh chapter to inform and promote communication within the chapter and the Society. Material contained in this publication may be reprinted by other STC chapters, provided credit is given. Please send a copy of the reprint to the editor. Readers are invited to submit ads, short articles, news, reviews, and other material of interest to technical communicators by the 10th of the month prior to publication to:
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STC WorkQuest™ Group Update

By Dave Vaglia, WorkQuest™ Librarian

This year, WorkQuest™ has continued to hold weekly Tuesday 10:00 AM sessions at area Panera Bread Stores. Many of these meetings focused on the core needs of a career search. The speakers were either experts in the areas covered, or group members sharing their extensive backgrounds, experiences, successes and frustrations.

Each meeting normally begins with a check-in round. The check-in round includes each person's introduction, what they are looking for, and what he or she has done since the last meeting attended. These check-in rounds help elicit advice and provide possible leads for others in the meeting. New attendees are given additional time and support for their initial check-in.

To date this year, specific sessions were held on:

- Organizing contact information, Marc Snyder
- Questions to ask an interviewer, Dennis McCarthy
- Writing a personal job search ad, Dick Dupree
- Developing content for networking contact information, Rocky Hayslip
- Marketing yourself, Dennis McCarthy
- Marketing brochure for job search, Janis Ramey
- You are what you write like
- Thank you notes and other follow-ups, Hank Walshak
- What to do on a daily, weekly, monthly basis, Janis Ramey
- Job search checklist, Rocky Hayslip
- Resumes for high-level executives, Janis Ramey

WorkQuest™ has uploaded many of the handouts and presentations used in our meetings onto its website <http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest>.

A WorkQuest™ brochure and poster, designed by **Becky Stenger**, along with clever table toppers (similar to tents but much more inventive) created by **Robert Sterbal** were

reviewed and critiqued for the WorkQuest™ table at the Region 4 STC conference.

Lastly, the STC WorkQuest™ library needs some additional titles, both books and software. Requests have been made for:

- Flash software and books
- Quark software
- Prepress software and books

If you have any copies you are not using, please consider donating them to the WorkQuest™ library so job seekers can use them to upgrade their skills. Older versions are perfectly acceptable since they are being used for learning the programs, not for commercial use. We'd also be happy to have other items you think would help job seekers. Since STC is a non-profit, donations are probably tax deductible.

Please contact me, Dave Vaglia, the WorkQuest™ librarian if you have any questions:

vagliadj@verizon.net (412) 491-6944.

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2003/2004 STC Publications Competition Results

(continued from page 1)

<i>Best of Show</i>		
Competition	Entry Title	Submitter
Technical Publications	Notary Notes, Volume 49, Issues 291, 292, and 293	Pennsylvania Association of Notaries
<i>Distinguished</i>		
Competition	Entry Title	Submitter
Technical Art	Safeguards and Security Billboard	BWXT Y-12
Technical Publications	ServiceOn Data	Marconi Communications
Technical Publications	Beyond the Human Genome Project	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Technical Publications	Notary Notes, Volume 49, Issues 291, 292, and 293 (BEST OF SHOW)	Pennsylvania Association of Notaries
<i>Excellence</i>		
Competition	Entry Title	Submitter
Technical Publications	Preface: Organizational Profile (2002 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Application)	ANSYS Inc.
Technical Art	Space Reactors: Y-12 Applied Technologies	BWXT Y-12
Technical Publications	Motorola A388 GSM Digital Wireless Telephone User's Guide	Motorola, Inc.
Technical Publications	Software Engineering Institute Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2002	Software Engineering Institute
Technical Art	ExplorNet Promotion for Element K Courseware	The Verdi Group
<i>Merit</i>		
Competition	Entry Title	Submitter
Technical Publications	Rapid Decision Making	Development Dimensions International (DDI)
Technical Publications	ViPr Desktop Terminal User Guide	Marconi Communications
Technical	NarcStation Training Materials	McKesson Automation

FrameMaker and RoboHelp Authoring Tools

The March chapter meeting was a workshop organized jointly by the Pittsburgh, Northeast Ohio Professional and Youngstown State University Student Chapters

This exciting all-day event featured three major new tools for the technical writer – FrameMaker version 7.1, RoboHelp for FrameMaker, and RoboHelp X5. Alan Houser

FrameMaker 7.1

By Alan Houser

Alan introduced the topic that drives these new tools – managing documents as data. This technique creates information that is maintainable and easy to deliver, which enables the author to single source. The rationale for single sourcing is that output devices have changed, each device has its own output requirements, and business constantly tries to minimize cost. So we writers try to reuse our documents rather than rewrite them.

Alan described four levels of maturity that a document can reach. The first level is unstructured and does not use a template. The second level uses a template, allows automated formatting and contains some metadata. The third level uses XML or some other structured authoring, separates content from format, and contains enough metadata to allow automatic processing. The fourth level combines the second and third levels with a content management system.

FrameMaker 7.1 can be used on the second and third level of document. It combines two powerful desktop publishing applications, standard FrameMaker and FrameMaker with SGML, and takes them to the newest level, XML publishing. Alan demonstrated both the unstructured and structured features of FrameMaker 7.1 and showed how this took can support migration to XML publishing.

Alan Houser is a principal partner with Group Wellesley, a Pittsburgh PA-based company that provides documentation and content management consulting and training services.

RoboHelp for FrameMaker

By RJ Jacquez

RJ demonstrated RoboHelp for FrameMaker, Macromedia's newest tool for single-sourcing. The user interface provides a smooth transition between FrameMaker and RoboHelp. It puts RoboHelp on your FrameMaker menu bar and runs both applications simultaneously.

If you produce paper output as well as on-line help from your FrameMaker files, Macromedia recommends that you use this version of RoboHelp.

RJ Jacquez is the Product Manager for RoboHelp for FrameMaker at Macromedia, Inc. RJ has fifteen years of experience with Adobe FrameMaker, including eight years as a professional FrameMaker instructor.

RoboHelp X5

By Michael Hamilton

Mike demonstrated the new features in X5, including content management, multi-author support, distributed workforce support, and PDF and XML import and export. He also demonstrated how FlashHelp can be used in a help project. The interface resembles Microsoft Word.

If you author with other applications in addition to FrameMaker, or if you only produce on-line help from your FrameMaker projects, Macromedia recommends that you use this version of RoboHelp.

Michael Hamilton is Product Manager for Macromedia's award-winning RoboHelp product line. His work includes gathering input and feedback from the customer community and guiding ongoing development of the RoboHelp products.

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Give Your Online Help a Face Lift

By Robert P. Mohr

Is the appearance of your online help a little too bland? Would you like to change the look of the help so that it compliments the application? Are you worried that you aren't artistic enough to make the changes? Not to worry. RoboHelp's skin editor makes it easy to transform an otherwise blase-looking help system into a real work of art without requiring artistic capability.

RoboHelp's WebHelp (platform independent, HTML-based) help system uses skins to control its appearance. Figure 1 shows the default skin applied to a WebHelp help system.



Figure 1: Default skin applied to WebHelp help systems

Not very impressive, is it? Fortunately, changing the skin is easy.

1. In RoboHelp, click the **Skins** section heading in the **Project** panel.
2. Right-click on the **Default** skin and select **Edit** from the pop-up menu. The WebHelp Skin Editor is displayed. (You can also right-click on the **Skins** heading and select **New Skin** from the pop-up menu. The new skin is based on the Default skin, but leaves the Default skin intact.)

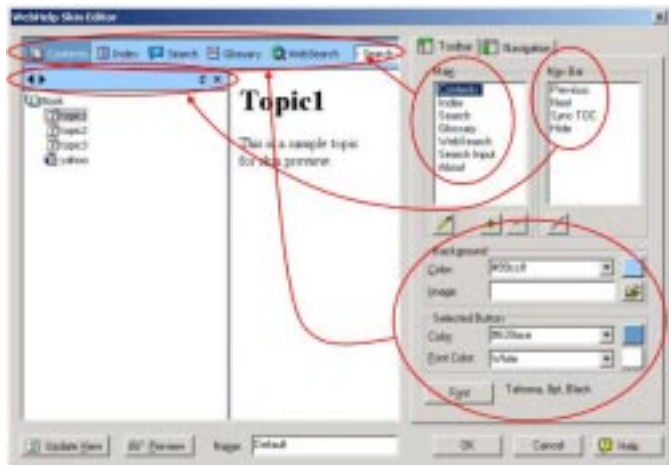


Figure 2: Toolbar controls

The default skin uses text for the navigation buttons. The options shown in the **Background** and **Selected Button** sections in the lower-right corner of Figure 2 are used to control the appear-

ance of the buttons when they are clicked and moused over. You can also use graphics in place of the text buttons. For example:

1. Select the **Contents** toolbar item in the **Main** window.
2. Click the pencil icon to edit the Contents item. The **Toolbar Item** dialog box is displayed with the **Default Image** option selected.

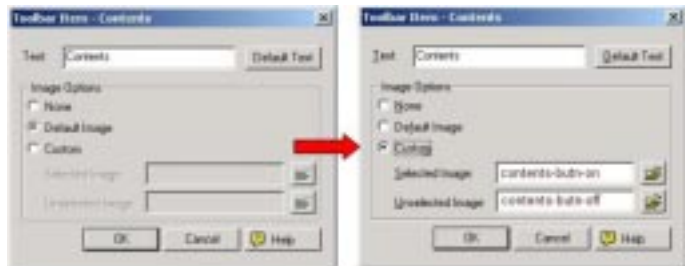


Figure 3: Toolbar Item Contents dialog box

3. Select the **Custom** option and select the images you want to use for the **Selected** and **Unselected** conditions displayed when the images are clicked or moused over.
4. Click **OK**.

The Index, Glossary, Search, and Web Search items can be modified the same way. The About item is a slightly different animal. This item lets you replace the *Powered by RoboHelp* graphic displayed in the right-hand corner of Figure 1. Figure 4 gives a breakdown of the About screen components.



Figure 4: About screen components

Another area you can modify is the vertical navigation bar or Table of Contents area. Several options are visible under the **Navigation** tab.

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Give Your Online Help a Face Lift

(continued from page 5)

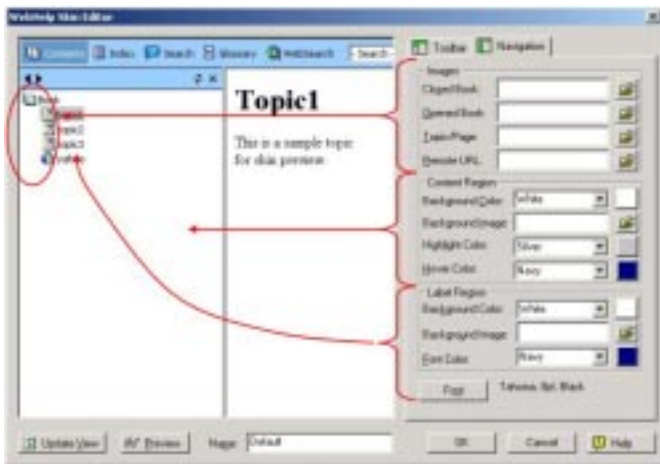


Figure 5: Navigation elements and their attributes

Most of the options are self-explanatory. The **Images** section refers to the images used to precede each book- and page-level heading. The **Content Region** controls the space behind the text, and the **Label Region** controls the text.

Testing the new look is also easy. Just click the **Preview** button. If you don't like what you see, close the preview, make more changes, and preview again.

If you had selected the **New Skin** option (mentioned at the beginning of this article), then enter a name in the **Name** box prior to clicking **OK**. If, instead, you chose to edit the Default skin, then click **OK** to close the editor and save all changes.

Now, for those who may find this all very interesting, but not something you want to do, there is another option: You can download a new skin from RoboHelp's Skins Collection Web page:

1. Right-click on the **Skins** heading in the Project pane and select the **Import from the Web** option from the pop-up menu. RoboHelp's Skins Collection Web page is displayed.
2. Click the **Visit the WebHelp Skins Gallery** link.
3. Locate the skin you want and click its **Download** link.
4. Save the skin file (.zkn) to your computer.
5. Right-click on the **Skins** heading in the Project pane and select the **Import** option from the pop-up menu.
6. Select the downloaded file from step 4. It is displayed in the WebHelp Skin Editor allowing you the opportunity to change it if necessary. You can also give the skin a name other than its default name, such as ABCcustom.
7. Make changes to the skin or accept its appearance as is by clicking **OK**.

The final step is to apply the new skin to your help system when it's time to regenerate, as shown in Figure 6.

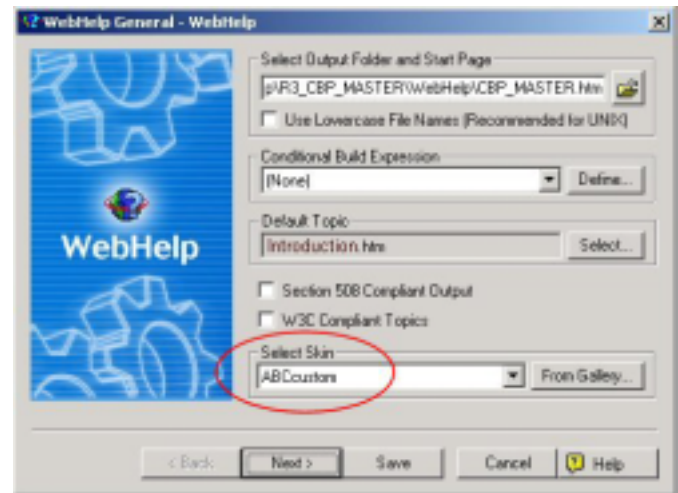


Figure 6: Select the new skin prior to generating output

Once the new skin has been selected, it remains selected until you change it. So, experiment a little and give your help system a face lift with a new skin.

Robert Mohr is a senior STC member and the author of The Elements of Word. He can be reached via e-mail at rpmohr@writemohr.com.

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Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Society Events

July 25-27, 2004

The Sacramento Chapter STC will host the **STC Region 8 Conference** at the University of California, Davis. The conference will feature seminars, a regional leadership summit, and a trade show and career expo. For more information, please contact:

Eric Butow

ceo@butow.net

www.stcregion8conference.org

October 21-24

The Intermountain Chapter STC will host the 2004 STC Region 5 Conference at the Wyndham Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah. The conference theme is "Ascending the Summit: A Technical Communication Expedition." For more information, please contact:

Marj Hermansen-Eldard

(650) 842-9486

meldard@legato.com

STC Announces Fellows and Associate Fellows for 2004

The highest rank that the Society for Technical Communication can confer upon a member is that of fellow. The select few who become fellows are associate fellows who have attained eminence in the arts and sciences of technical communication through service that has distinguished both the Society and the profession.

STC recognizes and honors deserving senior members by conferring upon them the rank of associate fellow. Those selected as associate fellows are exceptional individuals who have consistently demonstrated meaningful contributions to the Society and to the profession over a period of years.

For 2004, the STC has selected ten new fellows and 25 associate fellows. A complete list can be found in the March issue of Tieline (www.stc.org/tieline/issues/2004_03.pdf).

New Brochure to Replace *About STC and 10 Reasons*

The STC office has created a new brochure to replace *About STC and 10 Reasons to Join STC*. The new brochure explains the benefits of STC membership and the relevance of the Society to technical communicators in each stage of their careers. It will be mailed to each chapter in March. The brochure will also be available for download from www.stc.org/brochures.asp.

STC Offers Members New Health Insurance Program

STC now offers its members a range of health insurance options, thanks to a program recently implemented in cooperation with Marsh Affinity Group Services, a leader in insurance program management.

The new health insurance program gives STC members living in the United States a number of options. Those who value "freedom of choice" may enroll in the Major Medical Plan (Traditional). Those who prefer to choose from a prepared list of doctors and facilities may enroll in a Preferred Provider Option (PPO). Both plans are offered to individuals and to employers with a small number of employees. Self-employed members may want to consider the new Medical Savings Account (MSA) option, while some small employers may prefer a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) option.

In February, Marsh will mail informational brochures to STC members who have consented to be listed on the STC mailing list. The Web site at stc.healthinsurance.com provides additional information about insurance options and allows members to get rate quotes from providers in their local areas. STC members may also enjoy discounts on other types of insurance from Mutual of Omaha. These include disability coverage, critical illness insurance, life insurance, long-term care insurance, and pension plans. Information about these insurance options can be found at www.mutualofomaha.com/stc.

If you have questions about the insurance options and discounts offered to STC members, please contact the STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

STC Announces Distinguished Chapter Service Award Winners for 2004

The Society for Technical Communication has long recognized the importance of the hard work and commitment of its chapter members. Without their energy and enthusiasm, the Society would cease to be the largest, most effective, and most prestigious organization of technical communicators in the world. In 1988, the Society initiated the distinguished chapter service award to recognize exemplary dedication to the chapter and its activities. The first awards were presented in 1989.

Congratulations to Darlene Mullenix from our own Pittsburgh chapter for being selected! All of the winners for 2004 are listed in the April issue of the Tieline. (www.stc.org/tieline/issues/2004_04.pdf).

STC's 52nd Annual Conference: Call for Proposals

STC's 52nd Annual Conference will take place May 8-11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. The call for proposals (and its accompanying application form) is posted on the STC Web site.

Nominating Committee Seeks Candidates for Society-Level Positions in 2005

Would you like to help STC remain a vital organization? You—and other members whom you know and respect—can perform this important function. How? By being a candidate for a Society-level position in 2005.

Ask yourself these questions: Are you good at listening to and implementing ideas? Do you think you can help direct and ad-

(continued on page 8)



Membership at a Glance
(as of February 29)

National

Total Members: 21,259
Total Chapters: 147

Pittsburgh Chapter

Total Members: 174

New Members:

- Nathan S. Colusci
- Robert J. Kinner
- Heather L. McCoy
- Chere Tiller
- Cheryl L. Turney
- Jonathan Weber

Society for Technical Communication

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Notes from the National Office

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minister Society-level activities? Would you like to represent our membership on ceremonial occasions? Could you help coordinate an array of programs beneficial to our profession? If your answers are “yes,” tell the STC nominating committee that you would be interested in running for office. Or, if you know another member who should be considered a candidate for a position on our board, please forward that person’s name to the nominating committee.

The nominating committee will consider all recommendations as it draws up the 2005 slate of candidates. Part of the committee’s process involves contacting potential candidates to confirm that they are interested in running for STC office.

The members of this year’s nominating committee are Mary R. Wise (manager), Washington, DC chapter; Rita B. Johnson, Middle Tennessee chapter; Christopher Juillet, Southeastern Michigan chapter; and two others to be determined in this spring’s election. Please feel free to discuss your ideas with any of these people.

Open Positions and Qualifications

In the STC year ahead, the nominating committee will be developing a slate of candidates for the following positions:

- Second vice president
- Treasurer
- Director-sponsor for Region 1
- Director-sponsor for Region 5
- Director-sponsor for Region 7
- Two nominating committee members

All candidates must be senior members. Candidates for second vice president must have extensive leadership experience, preferably in positions at the Society level. Candidates for treasurer should have strong communication skills and leadership experience at the chapter or regional level. Candidates for director-sponsor should have a history of successful STC leadership, pref-

erably at the chapter or regional level. Nominating committee candidates should have excellent judgment about people and wide acquaintance with members at all levels of the Society.

The nominating committee welcomes your suggestions about potential candidates for the positions listed here. If you think that you or someone you know should be considered, please fill out the nomination form, found in the April issue of the Tieline (www.stc.org/tieline/issues/2004_04.pdf), and return it to the STC office by July 30, 2004.

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Technical Standards Names Worst Manual

Editor's note: For some reason, we are mysteriously drawn to poor writing – maybe because we have a need to correct it, or because it affirms our own abilities, or maybe we are in need of a good scare. For whatever reason, bad writing is the literary equivalent of an automobile accident – you know you shouldn't look, but you do anyway. Technical Standards holds a contest which invites people to submit examples of bad manuals. The "winner" for the fourth annual contest has been announced, and excerpts from that announcement are below. For your reading pleasure. Or whatever.

Annual Contest Taps into Universal Frustration Caused by Poor Documentation and Underscores the Importance of Clear Technical Writing

"The frustration that's caused by a poorly written manual is almost a universal experience. Poor documentation can cause more confusion than comprehension and could lead to liability issues and hidden costs for companies," said Michelle Wier of Technical Standards. "On the other hand, good product documentation results in satisfied repeat customers, reduced costs, and limited liability exposure for companies."

With entries solicited from the 25,000+ membership of the Society for Technical Communication, Technical Standards' Worst Manual Contest is designed to underscore the importance of clear technical writing for everything from consumer products, computer hardware and software, to employee handbooks.

This Year's Winner: The Safety Section of a commercial air-conditioner User's Guide

This year's worst manual, submitted by Rhonda Bracey of South Perth, Western Australia, is a section of a User's Guide for an air-conditioning unit marketed to the general public. Rhonda's entry only consisted of the two-page Safety Section, but that was enough! As Rhonda Bracey puts it, "translator beware!" If the phrase, "...to have the observance without fail to prevent the damage to harm and the property beforehand to the person who use this product and other persons" doesn't scare you, then some of the other text will!

The symbol key alone provided much material for the staff at Technical Standards to question. For example, the symbol key contained a symbol (twice) that wasn't referenced in the text, but didn't contain a symbol that was referenced. In another instance, the same symbol was used for both Warning and Caution, but each represented very different consequences. The difference between possible death compared to minor injury or material damage seems worth having its own distinction. There were also some amusing symbol descriptions such as, "Attention rousing," "Prohibition" and "Compulsion."

A few excerpts:

"Please do not put the one embarrassed because it gets wet under the air conditioner."

"To apply the cold wind to the body for a longtime and so as to not exist about cooling too much"

"Do not blow the wind to animals and plants directly. It occasionally causes a

bad influence for animals and plants to be exerted."

Often, poorly written manuals for consumer products can be attributed to translation problems. Clear, accurate translations are extremely important when communicating health and safety warnings associated with operating or assembling a product.

"For many end users, bad documentation amounts to nothing more than an inconvenience and possibly a poor impression of the company," said Wier. "But for companies, the results can affect the bottom line in terms of overloaded help lines, reduced revenues from dissatisfied customers who won't come back, and increased liability."

To view the top entries and more information about Technical Standards' fourth annual Worst Manual Contest, go to their Web site at www.tecstandards.com.

Technical Standards provides documentation writing and staffing services to Southern California companies in a wide range of industries.

Editorial Notice

This is the last regular issue of the *Blue Pencil* until the fall. However, coming soon will be a supplemental issue which summarizes the recent Regional Conference. Also, we will be asking chapter members to complete a survey about the *Blue Pencil* in order to make it more relevant and accessible to its readers. Please keep your eye out for notices about these two items in the near future!

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