The Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) has been publishing standards for the challenge course industry since the early 1990s. The standards are divided into two mutually supporting parts: Operations and Training, and Design, Performance, and Inspection. The standards are developed by volunteers and professionals from all aspects of the industry who come together to form a consensus about what is the minimum acceptable practice in operation, training, design, and inspection of challenge courses and zip lines. The process of determining what should be in the standard, writing the standards in clear and useable language, and coming to a consensus as an industry is the standards development process which takes place under the accreditation of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
In order to have the ACCT Standards recognized by regulators and other standards organizations, in the early 2000s ACCT started the process of becoming an ANSI Accredited Standards Developer. Accredited Standards Developers have a set of procedures for the development and approval of standards ensuring ANSI's 5 principles are upheld. The 5 principles are:

- **Openness** – All materially affected parties may participate in standards development. (That’s you!)
- **Transparency** – Meetings, Records, and voting are open to the public publicly (no secret meetings).
- **Consensus** – Decisions by more than a simple majority (not unanimity). Seeks to take into account views of all parties concerned, and to reconcile conflicting opinions.
- **Balance** – the decisions about the adoption of a standard may not be dominated by one segment of the industry.
- **Due process** – At each step in the approval process, participants in the process may use documented procedures to assure their concern has been heard and properly addressed.

So what does this process look like in practice and how do you become involved? The ACCT Standards Process is made up of 4 distinct groups. In charge of the approval of standards and the reconciling of comments made by people with an interest in the standards is the Consensus Group. The Consensus Group is made up of 12 to 15 people from the industry who review, modify, and approve the standards. The Consensus Group works closely with the Standards Development Committee (SDC). The SDC is made up of the heads of the Standards Writing Groups and is tasked with ensuring alignment between the groups and doing the extensive research required to determine what standards are needed. The third component of standards writing is the Standards Writing Groups. Each group is made up of between 4 and 10 industry professionals, engineers, educators, and others who carefully craft the specific language of the standards. The membership in these writing groups often changes and the skills needed in drafting the standards change. The final group is the community at large who reads and provides specific written feedback about each and every change in the standards.

This is the most important step in developing a high-quality standard.
Each year on the day after the ACCT Conference, the Consensus Group and the Standards Development Committee meet to discuss how the groups are functioning, process any public comments and determine what broad area of concern will be addressed in the next edition of the standards. This is an open, public meeting. If you are available, you are strongly encouraged to attend for part or all of the meeting. This, like all Consensus Group meetings, is announced publicly on the ACCT website at least 30 days in advance.

After the annual meeting, the Standards Writing Groups will begin drafting new standards or adjusting existing standards. This process takes between 4 months and 1 year.

The proposed changes and new standards are forwarded to the Consensus Group who determines if they should go out to public comment. This is a formal process of asking as many materially affected parties as possible to provide feedback on the new standards, their usefulness, and value. The announcement of a public comment period is announced in ANSI Standards Action -- the standards industry weekly bulletin, the ACCT website, member announcements, and other industry outlets. This is the most important part of the process. If you work on a course, build courses, or train people it is important that your voice is heard. Of all of the steps in standards development, the public comment period is the most important and substantial step.

After the public comment period closes, usually after 45 days, the Consensus Group will begin processing comments. Those who said they approve are thanked. Those who have concerns and ask for changes are contacted by either the Consensus Group or the Standards Writing Group. Each and every comment by each and every commenter is addressed until all issues are resolved. Occasionally, it is not possible to come to an agreement on new or adjusted language. When this happens the Consensus Group can make a formal statement that they are not able to come to an agreement. This is noted for the final approval process. In other cases, the Consensus Group may find that a person is “non-persuasive” because their comment does not address the standard or in other ways is not useful to the process. As an example, if a person comments that the change in the standard should address training when it is about how courses are built, then the Consensus Group will find it non-persuasive.
When all comments have been addressed the standards may need to go back out for public comment again because the changes made to the draft will affect the way a person would meet the standard. For example, if the draft standard said, “all staff must have first aid training” and the new edition after comment said, “half of staff must have first aid training” then this standard must go out for public comment again. This cycle continues until all in the process have their concerns addressed.

Once all comments have been addressed, the Consensus Group votes to publish the standard and a formal request is made of ANSI to approve the standard and validate the process used to create the standard. ANSI looks carefully at the way all comments were resolved, and who was on the Consensus Group to assure balance in the membership and to assure that no segment of the industry had dominance. If all has been done correctly, then ANSI will approve the standard as an American National Standard and ACCT will publish the document.

This process is long and some parts are ponderously slow yet very important. The industry needs standards to be significant, effective, and well thought out. The process and most importantly your participation in it is essential.

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