



Sales Bulletin – UL versus ETL

UL VERSUS ETL

ETL is a relative newcomer to the Nationally Recognized Test Laboratories market, but has been increasing in market visibility. Skeptics say that because they have a better Marketing department and a more customer service oriented approach than UL.

Like UL, ETL is a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory, or NRTL. However, unlike UL, ETL does not *create* standards; it simply *tests* electrical products to UL-created standards. This means that ETL and UL interpretations of proper testing protocol may be different for a given standard, with UL often taking a more stringent approach. It is for this reason that many engineers and AHJ's (Authority Having Jurisdiction, or local inspecting authority) strongly prefer a UL listing over an ETL listing, even though both come from and NRTL and are therefore "legal". Some specifiers even take the position that only a UL listing is acceptable for certain types of products.



In an article entitled, "When Laboratories Collide - UL vs. ETL Testing", by Andrew Jimenez of Anixter writes, "Underwriters Laboratories Inc. is perhaps the most respected and widely recognized organization of its type in North America. This venerable institution is a not-for-profit, independent testing and certification organization, with a history dating back to 1894. Over seventy-one thousand companies produce UL-certified products. There are more than 100,000 product evaluations a year with over 500,000 surprise follow-up compliance audits conducted through 125 inspection centers in 97 countries. In addition to these capabilities, UL is active in the development of UL Standards (928 to date) in accordance with ANSI and ASTM guidelines. Underwriters Laboratories is the undisputed leader in U.S. product safety, performance and certification, setting a benchmark by which all other organizations in the field may be measured (Statistics updated from UL's website).



It is known that UL never certifies a product until it passes all the standard requirements and a very stringent internal review process. The checks and balances system that UL has always implemented tends to cause delays to which manufacturers are very averse. In addition, UL has a very comprehensive follow-up program to ensure that products made after certification continue to be manufactured consistently with the initially certified and tested product. ETL, on the other hand, is considered within the test and measurement community to be less rigorous in both the certification and the follow-up of the products that they evaluate.

Many manufacturers choose the demanding certification of an organization that commands respect as a result of a long history of uncompromising science. The choice of Underwriters Laboratories over all other contenders was due in part to their unparalleled reputation of integrity. Manufacturers want UL's demanding scrutiny and the withering crossfire of peer review, both for the laboratory and the products recommended to customers."

Jimenez voices the opinion of many, and for these same reasons ETC has made the decision that permanently installed products, and products dealing with high power such as dimming, switching and wiring devices will continue to be tested at UL. Cord-connected, relatively power-limited products such as consoles and automated fixtures may be tested at either laboratory, UL or ETL, depending on time to market, costs and market preferences.

We encourage you to do some research on your own. Search out your engineers and ask them what their thoughts are regarding UL and ETL. You will have a better understanding of where they sit on future projects.