

IEEE Standards Interpretation for IEEE Std 1003.1™-2001 IEEE Standard Standard for Information Technology -- Portable Operating System Interface (POSIX®)

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Interpretation Request #108

Topic: man standard error **Relevant Sections:** XCU man

The standard currently specifies that the man command must not use standard error for other than diagnostic messages. However, historic implementations have written a message "Reformatting page. Wait..." when they started to reformat the nroff source for a page, and have followed this by "done" when finished. These messages had originally been written to standard output in 4BSD, but later, SunOS and SVR4 derivatives, whose implementations of /usr/ucb/man seem to be of BSD origin, have been writing it to standard error. These are not diagnostic messages, though, since they do not indicate an error but just a processing delay.

Now a) it makes sense to write such a message, since the user must sometimes wait several seconds for nroff even on moderately modern machines, and b) it makes sense to write it to standard error, since the message should not appear in the regular output e.g. if the user invokes something like "man utility | col -b >utility.txt". POSIX should thus not disallow such messages.

Change line 24571 to "The standard error shall be used for diagnostic messages, and may also be used for optional informational messages of unspecified format."

Interpretation Response

The standards states the requirements for the man utility, and conforming implementations must conform to this. However, concerns have been raised about this which are being referred to the sponsor.

Rationale for Interpretation: None.