IEEE Standards Interpretations for IEEE Std 1003.2™-1992 IEEE Standard for Information Technology--Portable Operating System Interfaces (POSIX®)--Part 2: Shell and Utilities

Interpretation Request #74
Topic: rm exit status **Relevant Clauses:** 4.53

POSIX.2 Subclause 4.53 specifies the semantics of the "rm" utility. My question has to do with the correct behavior of "rm" when it is applied to an ordinary file that has no write permission, when standard input is a terminal. If file Foo has mode r--r--r-- (i.e., is not writeable), and the command rm Foo is issued, and the user, in response to a prompt asking if the file should be removed, responds negatively, then what value should the exit status have? My reading of the standard (subclause 4.53.8) is that it should be nonzero. However, I note that existing practice on all the systems to which I have access is to exit with status zero under these circumstances. Was it the intent of the committee to change the semantics from existing practice?

Interpretation Response
The standard states the behaviour for rm, 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.