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 #115
Topic: mailx visual command edits messages in sequence. **Relevant Clauses:** 4.40.7.2.38

In subclause 4.40.7.2.38 (Edit Messages with full-screen editor), the Extended Description of the mailx command, (P354, L6803-6806), it says: Synopsis: v[isual] [msglist] Edit the given messages with a screen editor. The messages shall be placed in a temporary file and the utility named by the VISUAL variable (see 4.40.5.3) shall be invoked to edit the file. The default editor shall be vi. While this language is clear, and corresponds well with the language in the SVID (mailx(au_cmd, p 6-50)), the actual historical behavior of this command should be expressed as follows: Edit the given messages. Each message shall be placed in a temporary file and the utility named by the VISUAL variable (see 4.40.5.3) shall be invoked to edit each file in sequence. The default editor shall be vi. I believe that this variance from actual historic practice was not intended. The rationale for mailx seems to carefully point out the cases where the standard differs from historic practice, but does not mention this issue.

Interpretation Response
The standard states the behavior for the visual command in mailx, 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.