The working group on the Standard Seismic Phase Names was set up by the IASPEI Commission on Seismological Observation and Interpretation (CoSOI) in 2001. The group was chaired by D. A. Storchak and included R. D. Adams, P. Bormann, E. R. Engdahl, J. Havskov, B. L. N. Kennett and J. Schweitzer. The WG put together a modified standard nomenclature of seismic phases that is logical, concise, consistent and self-explanatory on the basis of agreed rules. We have not tried to create a complete list of phases which are observable on seismograms. Neither have we tried to compile a phase nomenclature for all special phase observations used in research papers. Instead, the new list assists an expanded standardized data reporting and exchange between seismic observatories, data centres and data users.

After numerous consultations with the seismological community, the Standard Seismic Phase List was finalized and adopted by the CoSOI/IASPEI at its meeting in Sapporo in 2003. It was further updated in 2009 to take into account changes in seismological practices to date.

The new list modifies and complements the phase nomenclature, published in the previous edition of the Manual of Seismological Observatory Practice (Willmore, 1979) and is an essential part of the New Manual of Seismological Observatory Practice. It is more in tune with modern Earth models and accounts for the significantly increased detection capabilities of modern digital seismic stations. The new phase list also uses the larger flexibility of the international bulletin data exchange format (ISF).