F L I S
Federal Logistics Information Service

The Heart of Logistics Information

Introduction

The most potent supply management tool the government has, is the National Stock Number (NSN), which is contained in the Federal Logistics Information System (FLIS). Federal agencies, including the Department of Defense (DoD), use the NSN to buy and manage billions of dollars worth of supplies each year. Currently, there are about 6.1 million active items and another 7 million inactive items in the federal catalog managed by DoD. There are another 8 million active items managed by NATO and the international community. Management of the government's vast inventories would be difficult and confusing without the NSN. It is the key to achieving interoperability and supportability of current and future DoD weapons systems.

History

The NSN has official recognition by the US Government, NATO and many other governments around the world. Large corporations and various government agencies have used stock numbering systems to manage their vast inventories for many years, but the current model grew out of the turbulence of World War II. During the war it was often difficult to locate needed supplies due to the inconsistency in the various management systems. A variety of manufacturers' item names and part numbers for identical items, made it difficult to manage inventories. A common language of supply was needed to manage the growing complexity of modern logistics. The common language has been refined over the years into the National Stock Number, which is maintained in the Federal Logistics Information System (FLIS).

The evolution of logistics information is the result of the dynamic advancement in technology. New advancements in technology increase the complexity of our weapon systems. The logistics to support today's systems has become more critical. It seems reasonable that this trend will continue in the future. It is imperative that logistics information is properly standardized, packaged and delivered - this is exactly what the FLIS and NSN provide.

The Federal Logistics Information System has been managed within the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) by the Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS) since 1962. The DLIS mission was recently expanded to perform services for DoD, international and civil agencies such as Federal Aviation Administration and National Weather Service. This consolidation improves the ability of logisticians to support users jointly across all the services, and in over 40 countries that use the NSN.

Structure

Virtually everything useful to know about an item is collected and entered into the Federal Logistics Information System (FLIS). All of the data about an item of supply in FLIS is referenced to a NSN. NSNs are numbers that are thirteen digits long. The first four digits classify items into logical groupings. The next two digits indicate the country that assigned the NSN (00 and 01 represent the United states). The remaining seven digits make each NSN unique. The NSN is the central link between a wide range of logistics data which includes: item name, manufacturer(s) part numbers, physical characteristics, shipping data, special handling, storage, shelf-life, disposal requirements, and many other kinds of data. It is the key that unlocks all the valuable information about the item to which it was assigned.

Who Benefits from using NSN?

- All levels of maintenance and supply
- Requisitioner of parts/products
- Material management personnel
- ICP Material Managers, procurement, account personnel
- Acquisition personnel
- FMS, NATO and other international customers
- Reutilization and disposal personnel
- Operations planners
- Technical inspectors
- Industrial base assessment personnel
- Staffers at various levels
- Contractors

Benefits

The NSN is the foundation for joint service and agency cooperation in logistics within the federal government and among the agencies and vendors doing business with the government. NSNs are understood and recognized throughout NATO and many other countries. They are an international language of logistics, which promotes interoperability and supportability for weapons systems.

The use of NSNs, provides logistics **managers, acquisition personnel, operations planners,** and all **industrial base assessment personnel** with a standard method of identifying and tracking items of supply. Managers can rely on the structure and attributes of items assigned to a NSN for improved supply management, to save money, and reduce costs.

The NSN aides cross service supply, by permitting the Services to access the same information and identify items using NSNs. **Mechanics, technical inspectors,** and other **maintenance personnel** can review the NSN in the FLIS to find information on all parts needed to maintain and support end items, which improves cycle times for design, manufacture and repair processes while extending weapon system lifecycles. **Reutiliztion** and **disposal personnel** use the FLIS to identify NSNs that require special handling upon disposal such as items with certain demilitarization requirements, contain precious metals, and possible hazardous materials.

NSNs play a central theme in the emerging role of staffers and **contractors** supporting military operations, as well as in the continuing integration of the Services in joint military maneuvers. An item may be purchased from a contractor, delivered by the Air Force, distributed by the Navy and used by the Army. The importance of using a single language of supply, such as the NSN, becomes increasingly important as it promotes interoperability, readiness and availability to all users.

Our **NATO allies** and **other friendly countries** have long recognized the value of using common NSNs. It affords the opportunity to share parts in other countries when facing critical situations. The NATO Codification System (NCS) is patterned after the Federal Catalog System and is fully interoperable within it. The NCS provides a common supply language in NATO, and supports multinational logistics operations in more than 20 other countries.

Additional Benefits.

- Avoiding purchase and storage of unnecessary stock.
- Identifying shelf life expiration dates.
- Avoiding purchase of duplicate inventory (many manufactures/many part numbers).
- Accounting for existing inventory.
- Negotiating lower purchase prices for new inventory by review of pricing information.
- Identifying multiple sources to assure availability of stock.
- Reducing downtime by enabling the user to quickly identify, locate, and order needed parts/supplies (multiple uses for existing parts).
- Maximizing the use of available resources by identifying items of supply that are interchangeable.
- Distinct identifying of records with visibility to all users (centralizes information).
- Built-in protection for safeguarding proprietary information and limiting access.
- Life cycle managing from: requisition, acquisition, maintenance, to disposal.

Cost of A NSN

The total ownership cost is reduced since cost is allocated across the services by service level billing. The costs normally do not come out of program managers' dollars.

FLIS and Commercial Numbering Systems

There are many different manufactures with many part numbers using various commercial numbering systems that can equal one NSN, which is one unique item of supply. The following are examples of different commercial numbering systems

- Universal Product Code (UPC) –Is a bar code system that has been widely adopted. It is the equivalent of a manufacturer's or supplier's part number.
- Part Number – Is a manufacturer's unique numbering system that identifies the items/parts they produce.
- National Drug Code – Is a unique 10-digit, 3-segment number which is assigned to identify the labeler/vendor, product, and trade package size of items listed under Section 510 of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The product names used in the Directory are generally those supplied by the labelers as required under the Act and are limited to a maximum of 64 characters and can vary according to the perceptions of the labelers. (I looked this up on the Internet)
- Universal Standard Products and Services Classification Code (UNSPSC) – This code resulted from merger of the United Nations Development Program and Dun & Bradstreet, which combined separate commodity classification codes into a single open system. It is used to classify both products and services that are used globally.

In an NSN data package you may find any or all of the above codes. The NSN provides the single cross reference among various methods for coding items of production. All NSNs are stored and maintained in the FLIS.

Many of the commodity classifications include a code for each individual item or part in supply. There can be numerous items of production (same form, fit and function) under one NSN because they equate to the same basic item of supply – but they can be acquired from many different vendors and/or distributors.

The most common need heard from commercial numbering system users is the ability to easily find what they are seeking. There are many factors that contribute to the problem. The most common are:

- The systems use different acronyms and/or abbreviations for the same part/product description, which are often misinterpreted. For Example "#", "lb", "Pd", or "Pound".

- Products/Parts often contain incomplete descriptions.
- No standard format for grouping items in a logical order, which makes searching for and/or finding a product or part very time consuming.
- Same item can be classified in two or more categories (e.g. A drinking glass under Beverage Containers, Camping Equipment, Kitchen Supplies, and Housewares).

Conclusion

- The FLIS is the universal system for logistics information.
- The NSN is the International language of logistics.
- Together they make sense of the often-confusing array of suppliers and supply parts and they provide affordable readiness and reduction of total ownership cost..
- The FLIS and the NSN ensures that the user gets the right item at the right time, in the right place, at the right price – every time.