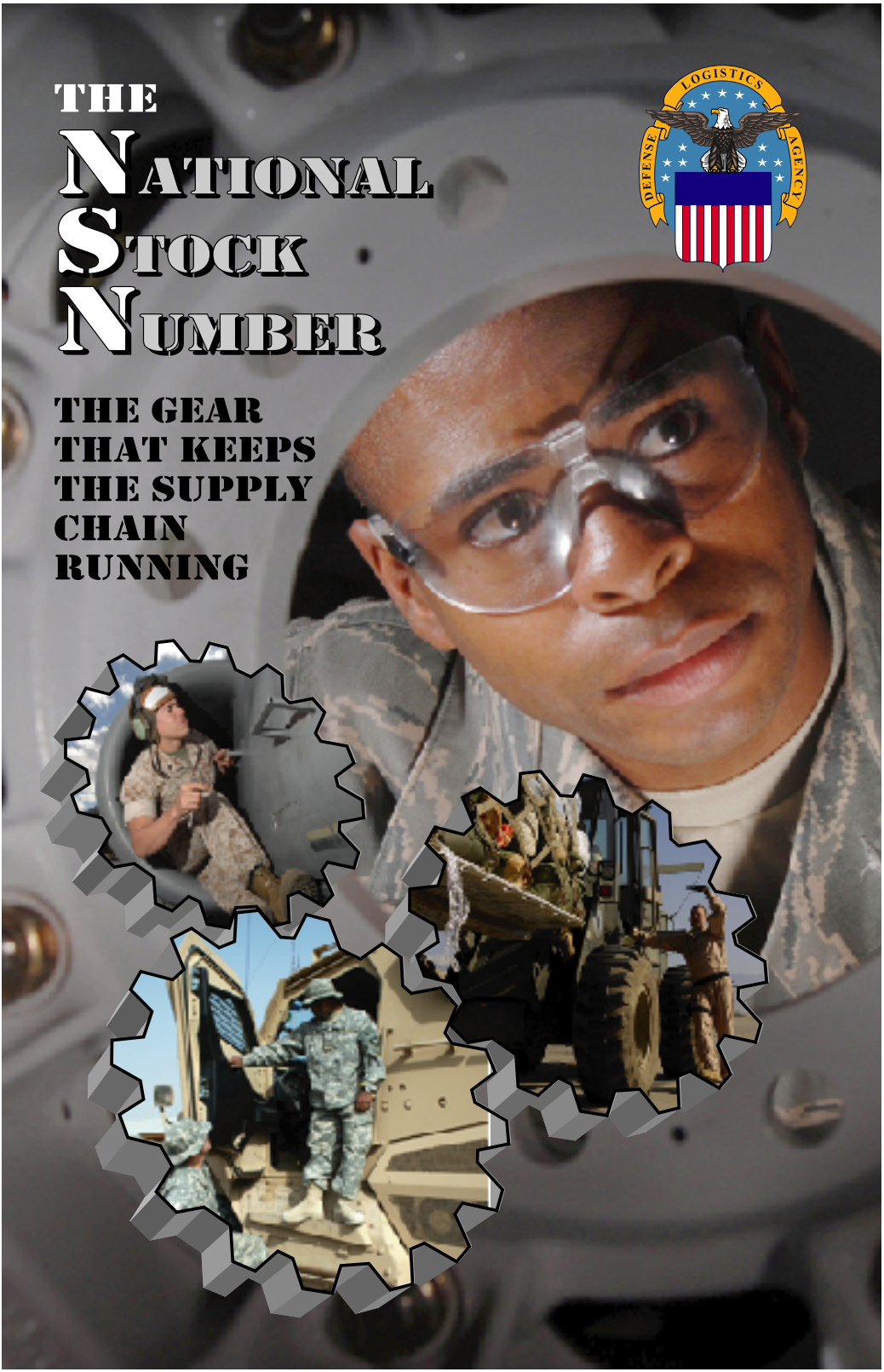
THE NATIONAL STOCK NUMBER

THE GEAR THAT KEEPS THE SUPPLY CHAIN RUNNING



Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS) Providing Support for All the Services

"A Defense Logistics Agency Command"

What is a National Stock Number (NSN)?

A National Stock Number is simply the official label applied to an item of supply that is repeatedly procured, stocked, stored, issued, and used throughout the federal supply system. It is a unique item identifying series of numbers. When a NSN is assigned to an item of supply, data is assembled to describe the item. Some data elements include information such as an item name, manufacturer's part number, unit price, and physical and performance characteristics. NSNs are an essential part of the military's logistics supply chain used in managing, moving, storing, and disposing of material.

NSNs are used to identify and manage nearly every imaginable item, from *aircraft parts* to *light bulbs.* The use of NSNs facilitates the standardization of item names, supply language, characteristics and management data and aids in reducing duplicate items in the federal inventory. It also helps to standardize the military requirements for testing and evaluation of potential items of supply, as well as identifying potential duplicate items.

The United States Air Force's F/A-22 Raptor. Thousands of Raptor parts have been assigned NSNs.

Many types of commercially made light bulbs have been assigned NSNs

The NSN is officially recognized by the United States government, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and many governments around the world. Federal agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD), use the NSN to buy and manage billions of dollars worth of supplies yearly. Currently, there are over 7 million NSNs in the federal supply system.

Why Was The Concept of a NSN Created?

During World War II, it was common to find different names applied to a single item of supply used by each military service. That made it difficult for the Services to locate supplies and, in most cases, impossible to share items of supply. This resulted in an item depletion situation for one service and item surplus situation for another due to different naming conventions.

To illustrate this complex issue one only needs to consider what the name of the following item is. Is it a washer, a spacer or a shim?

The correct name for this item is WASHER, FLAT.

This is one example of why it is so important to establish a common name and description for a single item of supply. If each of the services called this washer by a different name, there would be no way to identify and move assets from one service to another when needed. Additionally, it was determined to be essential that DOD describe all like items the same, with the same characteristics to facilitate comparison of items and avoid proliferation of like items in the DOD inventory.

Even today, commercial entities continue to justify and reinforce the need for a standardized national stock numbering system.
Manufacturers, as in the case of the preceding washer, use a variety of item names for identical parts. Cataloging these items with different item names creates inconsistencies in the various logistics management systems, making it difficult to identify, separate and control inventory of items.

Manufacturers use many different commercial part numbering conventions. For example, manufacturers may refer to their items of supply using various descriptors like a Universal Product Code (UPC), a National Drug Code, and/or a Universal Standard Products and Services Classification Code (UNSPSC) as part of the item description. The NSN alleviates manufacturers from using various languages to describe items of supply by standardizing naming conventions and logistics management data.

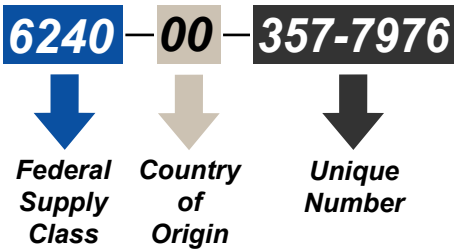
What Does a NSN Structure Look Like?

Everyone recognizes this number system, (269) 961-7766. It is, of course, a telephone number. The three distinct parts of a phone number are easily identifiable. The first part is the area code, the second part is the exchange, and the third part is a unique four-digit number.

(269) 961-7766

Just as each part of a telephone number has a distinct meaning, a NSN is formatted to convey specific information about the item of supply.

The NSN is a 13-digit code, and it is depicted as: 6240-00-357-7976



The first four digits of the NSN are known as the Federal Supply Class (FSC). For example, 6240 is the FSC for electric lamps. It is used to group like items, which would include fluorescent lamps, incandescent lamps, mercury lamps, and sodium lamps. The next two digits make up the Country of Origin code. This code signifies the country that originally requested the NSN assignment. Codes 00 and 01 are both used to identify the United States. The remaining seven digits are sequentially assigned and are unique to each NSN.

Who Can Request a NSN Assignment?

Manufacturers and suppliers do not have the authority to request a NSN. This is usually accomplished once a requirement/need for that manufacturer's/supplier's item has been identified by a military service, NATO country or federal/civil agency. Requests are then forwarded thru the appropriate supply chain for cataloging, and then forwarded to DLIS for NSN assignment.

Who Assigns a NSN?

The Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS), located in Battle Creek, Michigan, assigns all NSNs at the request of the military services, certain federal and civil agencies, and foreign friendly countries. Each NSN assigned to an item of supply is the result of a careful review process known as cataloging. Cataloging is the process whereby each item of supply is named, assigned a Federal Supply Class, described to identify all known characteristics and performance data, and ultimately assigned a NSN. This information is contained and maintained in the Federal Logistics Information System (FLIS), which is managed by the DLIS. DLIS is part of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). DLIS is the only organization authorized to assign NSNs.

Requests for NSNs are initiated whenever a non-stocked item is repeatedly ordered or when a new weapons system is being developed. Whenever a new weapon system is deployed by a military service, the service engages in an upfront review known as a provisioning process. This process identifies all potential spares to ensure weapon system support throughout the life cycle of the weapon system. This step is essential to properly provide support to the warfighter. During the provisioning process all potential spare parts are identified and requests for NSN assignment are submitted to DLIS.

NSN: 6240-00-357-7976
Item Name: LAMP, MERCURY VAPOR

Company Name: Westron Corporation
CAGE Code: 51454

REQUIREMENT STATEMENT	CLEAR TEXT REPLY
ITEM NAME	LAMP, MERCURY VAPOR
OVERALL LENGTH	11.750 INCHES MAXIMUM
LIGHT OUTPUT RATING	11780.000 LUMENS NOMINAL SINGLE RATING
AVERAGE LIFE RATING IN HOURS	16000.0
EMITTED LIGHT CHARACTERISTIC	WHITE
VOLTAGE RATING	120.000 VOLTS NOMINAL
WATTAGE RATING	400.000 WATTS

During NSN assignment, a wide range of logistics data is assembled to define the item. This information includes the item name, manufacturer's part number, unit price, physical and performance characteristics, shipping data, special handling, storage, shelf life, and information associated with how to dispose of the item when no longer needed in the inventory.

Throughout the life of the NSN this data is routinely updated to include new manufacturers, price changes, part number changes or other changes affecting the support, logistics data, or characteristics of the item.

Who Uses NSNs?

The NSN is used by domestic and foreign governments, all the military services and various federal and civil agencies. The NSN is officially recognized by the United States government, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and many other governments around the world. The NSN affords the opportunity for greater cross-servicing potential and facilitates operations that involve many military services from many nations.

Federal Agencies

Many federal agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD), use the NSN to buy and manage billions of dollars worth of supplies yearly. The Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) establishes how each DLA-managed NSN will be stocked, stored and issued to the Services. DLA evaluates usage demands to determine required quantities of NSNs. The NSN is the foundation for logistics coordination between the services and government agencies.

Military Services

The practice of using a single language of supply like the NSN is increasingly important as it promotes coordination between the Services, readiness, and availability to all users. The NSN is also critical to the effective integration of the services in joint military endeavors.

The NSN enables military services to access the same information and identify like items of supply. Mechanics, technical inspectors, maintenance and other supply personnel can review NSN data in the FLIS to locate information on all parts needed to maintain and support weapon systems.

The use of NSNs provides logistics managers, procurement personnel, operations planners, and industrial base assessment personnel with a standard method of identifying and tracking items of supply in-storage, in-process, in-transit and in-theater.

Defense Reutilization

The Defense Reutilization and Marketing Offices (DRMOs) identify products for reutilization and/or disposal using the NSN to distinguish what items require special handling upon disposal. Examples include items with specific demilitarization requirements, items containing precious metals, hazardous materials or sensitive technology.

What's the Real Value of a NSN?

- reduces downtime by enabling procurement personnel to quickly identify, locate, and order parts or supplies
- accounts for existing inventory
- identifies shelf life of an item of supply
- maximizes use of available spares by identifying items of supply that are interchangeable or substitutable
- provides pricing information, which is valuable when negotiating contracts and managing military budgets
- improves cycle times for design, manufacture, and repair processes while extending weapon system life cycles
- centralizes item information on all items managed within DOD
- provides built-in protection for safeguarding proprietary information and limiting access to only those entities requiring such information
- records multiple manufacturers on NSNs which increases supportability
- aids in identifying duplicate items of supply

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching benefit of the NSN is that it provides life cycle management of items of supply, from requisition to acquisition to maintenance to disposal.

The Bottom Line

The FLIS is used worldwide for logistics information, and the National Stock Number (NSN) is the international language of logistics. Together, the FLIS and the NSN make sense of the often confusing array of suppliers and supply parts, and provides affordable readiness and reduction of total ownership cost.

DLIS Products and Services that Support NSNs

Federal Logistics Data (FED LOG) - Available on CD-ROM, DVD, and the Internet as well as LAN/WAN compatible. FED LOG includes FLIS data in addition to service peculiar data from all military services. FED LOG is generally used for engineering, technical research, provisioning, procurement, transportation, and disposal.

Asset Visibility (AV) - Is the DOD automated information system with the capability to view materiel assets in-storage, in-process, in-transit and in-theatre.

DOD EMALL - An internet based shopping mall that strives to be the single entry point for Department of Defense (DOD) and federal buyers and purchasers to shop for and buy off-the-shelf finished goods and services from the commercial marketplace and government sources.

WebFLIS (Federal Logistics Information System Web Inquiry) - Users can look up National Stock Numbers (NSNs), Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) codes information, part numbers, graphic images, characteristics data and item name information stored in the Federal Catalog System (FCS).

DLA Map Catalog - Defense Logistics Information Serivce (DLIS) produces a series of interactive catalogs for military and government use. These catalogs contain only products stocked by DLA and Defense Supply Center Richmond (DSCR). Each catalog contains products divided into four categories: aeronautical, digital, hydrographic, and topographic; all available in one category.

LEGISLATION OF THE 82ND CONGRESS
2ND SESSION (Year of 1952)
DEFENSE CATALOGING AND STANDARDIZATION ACT
CHAPTER 539 - PUBLIC LAW 436

An Act to provide for an economical, efficient, and effective supply management organization within the Department of Defense through the establishment of a single supply cataloging system, the standardization of supplies and the more efficient use of supply testing, inspection, packaging, and acceptance facilities and services.

This Act may be cited as the "Defense Cataloging and Standardization Act".

Sec. 2. There is hereby established within the Department of Defense, the Defense Supply Management Agency*, hereinafter referred to as the "Agency." This Agency shall develop a single catalog system and related supply standardization program.

Sec. 4.(a) In cataloging, the Agency shall name, describe, classify, and number each item repetitively used, purchased, stocked, or distributed, by the Department of Defense or any of the departments thereof, by such methods and in such manner that only one distinctive combination of letters or numerals or both will identify the same item either within a bureau of service, between bureaus or services, or between the departments. The single item identification shall be used for all functions of supply from original purchase to final field or area disposal. There shall be a single catalog, which may consist of a number of volumes, sections, or supplements, in which all items of supply shall be included and in which there shall appear information on each item needed for supply operations such as descriptive and performance data, size, weight, cubage, packaging or packing data, a standard quantitative measurement unit, and such other related data as is determined by the Director of the Agency to be necessary or desirable.

** Known today as the Defense Logistics Agency*

Defense Logistics Information Service

Logistics Data & IT Solutions

"A Defense Logistics Agency Command"

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