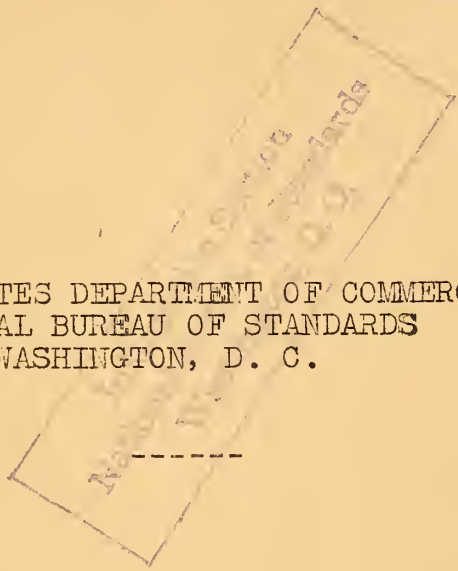


Letter  
Circular  
LC-497

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
WASHINGTON, D. C.



SERVICES OF THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
TO GOVERNMENTAL PURCHASING AGENCIES

-----



SERVICES OF THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
TO GOVERNMENTAL PURCHASING AGENCIES

The services and facilities of the National Bureau of Standards are being utilized more and more extensively not only by the Federal Government but also by State and municipal governments. By means of adequate tests, the Federal Government determines whether the vast quantities of supplies which it purchases actually comply in quality to the requirements of its specifications. The Federal Specifications under which these purchases are made are frequently revised and strengthened in the light of the Bureau's investigations, resulting in more satisfactory goods usually at no increase in cost.

The Bureau's services are proving of definite benefit not only to the Federal, but also to State and local tax-supported agencies, which to an ever-increasing extent are basing their purchases on specifications having national recognition.

From time to time the State, municipal, and other public purchasing agencies have sought the assistance of the National Bureau of Standards in the formulation of standards, specifications, and methods of test for their purchases. In

order to extend its cooperation to these tax-supported agencies, the Bureau launched a program on several phases of the purchasing field, including selection and use of Federal specifications; establishment of commercial standards and simplified practice recommendations; directories of standards and specifications; directory of commercial testing and college research laboratories; lists of sources of supply of commodities manufactured in accordance with certain selected Federal specifications and commercial standards; and the labeling of commodities.

#### Federal Specifications

Members of the staff of the National Bureau of Standards take an active part in the work of many technical committees of the Federal Government, particularly those engaged in the preparation of specifications. In this way the results of the investigations and tests made in the Bureau's laboratories are made available to these committees in the preparation of Federal specifications.

The Federal Specifications Executive Committee (FSEC), Procurement Division, Treasury Department, prepares and promulgates purchase specifications for the use of all Government departments and establishments. These specifications embody the best judgment of all Federal agencies as to the requirements for a given commodity which at the lowest cost will give satisfactory service.

The procedure for the formulation of a Federal specification is as follows: The need of a specification for a given article or material is fully considered by the Federal Specifications Executive Committee. If the specification is to be prepared, the work is assigned to a technical committee composed of representatives of each branch of the Federal Government interested in the particular subject, for consideration of all existing government and/or commercial specifications. After a specification has been selected or formulated which will be suitable for the uses intended, by all departments and establishments of the government, it is then submitted for comment and criticism to all agencies of the Federal Government and interested trade associations. All criticisms received are referred to the respective technical committee which may revise the proposed specification if it is found to be desirable or necessary. When approved by the technical committee and the FSEC, it is promulgated as a Federal specification by the Director of Procurement for use by all Government departments when purchasing the commodity specified. The specification so promulgated remains in effect until it is either rescinded or revised.

Up to April 1, 1937, the Federal Specifications Executive Committee had adopted and promulgated over 1100 Federal specifications covering a wide range of commodities. These specifications have had a profound effect in governmental purchasing. Many of the States and cities are now using them

almost exclusively as part of their contracts for purchases. All Federal specifications are issued in printed form and are obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at a nominal price. Any State or municipal purchasing officer desiring to do so can keep abreast of the current specifications used by the Federal Government by requesting from the Superintendent of Documents, or the National Bureau of Standards, from time to time, copies of the latest list of Federal specifications.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### Commercial Standards

The National Bureau of Standards aids business and user groups in the voluntary establishment of grades, quality, and other standards as a national basis for purchasing, testing, marketing, and certification of manufactured commodities other than foods and drugs. These are known as commercial standards<sup>(2)</sup> and set limitations below or beyond which the quality or grade of a commodity must not fall. The establishment of these standard facilitates, for the small as well as the large

- 
- (1) Price List No. 75, Federal Specifications, Federal Standard Stock Catalog. Obtainable free from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., or the Division of Codes and Specifications, National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C.
- (2) The Commercial Standards Service and Its Value to Business CS C-30. Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. Price 10 cents.

purchaser, both public and private, the specification method of buying and makes it effective as far as practicable by means of voluntary guarantees on invoices, on labels or by marks on the goods themselves. Such guarantee statements, labels, or marks are enforceable as a part of the sales contract directly through the courts; or by the Federal Trade Commission under its authority to act in the public interest in matters involving unfair competition in interstate commerce.

Up to April 1, 1937, the Bureau had established 60 commercial standards<sup>(3)</sup> covering a wide variety of commodities. The certification plan mentioned elsewhere has already been applied to 45 of these standards, and lists of willing-to-certify manufacturers covering commercial standards are distributed from time to time to all interested State and municipal purchasing agencies. Commercial standards are of real benefit to State and municipal agencies in that they afford a ready means for checking or inspecting the grade or quality of the material delivered on contracts based on these standards.

#### Simplified Practice

The Bureau serves as a clearing house or centralizing agency through which manufacturer, distributor, and consumer groups cooperate in furthering a nation-wide program for the

---

(3) List of Commercial Standards, Letter Circular 354.  
Obtainable from the National Bureau of Standards,  
Washington, D. C. Free.

elimination of excessive and needless variety of sizes, types, and dimensions of manufactured products. The simplified practice recommendation<sup>(4)</sup> resulting from this cooperative effort is a record of retained items, sizes or varieties considered adequate for normal stock purposes.

In addition to industry itself, direct cooperators in and beneficiaries of this activity are Federal, State, and municipal governments. The simplified practice recommendations are of direct interest to State, municipal and other tax-supported agencies for they aid in conserving public funds in the work of procurement. Specifically, the interest shown by cities and States in simplified practice is well illustrated in three simplified practice recommendations covering vitrified paving brick, asphalt, and lumber. The list of acceptors of these recommendations contain many States and municipalities. Representatives of several State and municipal governments appear on standing committees of various recommendations. Up to May 1, 1937, the Bureau had established 167 recommendations,<sup>(5)</sup> many of which are of direct concern to State and municipal governments.

- 
- (4) Simplified Practice - Its Purpose and Application.  
Letter Circular 456. Obtainable from the National  
Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C. Free.
- (5) List of Simplified Practice Recommendations, Letter  
Circular 345. Obtainable without charge from the  
National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C.



Directories of Standards and Specifications

A distinct service to governmental purchasing agencies for determining whether an applicable standard or specification exists for any commodity desired is rendered through several publications prepared and issued by the National Bureau of Standards which cover the subject of standards and specifications generally.

The first of these publications is the National Directory of Commodity Specifications<sup>(6)</sup> first issued in 1925, and revised in 1932. In it are classified and indexed more than 6000 standards and specifications, including the testing methods prepared by the national technical societies and trade associations, as well as the standards and purchase specifications of those agencies authorized to speak for the Federal government as a whole. This Directory does not reproduce the actual specifications, but lists them according to titles, designating numbers, and sponsoring organizations, and directions for obtaining actual copies of the documents. This publication will be of great assistance to any governmental purchasing officer in selecting specifications suited to his particular needs.

---

(6) National Bureau of Standards Miscellaneous Publication No. 130. Price \$1.75 per copy. Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

In addition, there have been prepared and issued by the Bureau two publications entitled "Standards and Specifications for Nonmetallic Minerals and Their Products"<sup>(7)</sup> and "Standards and Specifications for Metals and Metal Products."<sup>(8)</sup> These volumes contain the substance of every nationally-recognized standard and specification for the groups of commodities considered.

These specifications give governmental purchasing officials authoritative information as to whether there is in existence a standard, specification, or a method of test for a given commodity and also the substance of the requirements.

#### Certification Plan

Surveys have been made from time to time of the purchasing and commodity-acceptance testing methods employed by State and municipal purchasing agencies for the purpose of determining the manner in which the Bureau could be of assistance to them in solving their purchasing problems. An analysis of these surveys showed that many excellent specifications well

- 
- (7) National Bureau of Standards Miscellaneous Publication No. 110. Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at \$2.75 per copy.
- (8) National Bureau of Standards Miscellaneous Publication No. 12C. Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at \$3.00 per copy.

recognized throughout industry, including those prepared by the Federal Government, were not being widely used because of the inability on the part of the governmental purchasing officers, either through lack of testing facilities or expensiveness of tests, to determine whether or not commodities delivered correspond to specification requirements.

In order to facilitate the use of specifications, particularly among public purchasing agencies, the Bureau inaugurated the certification plan.<sup>(9)</sup> In carrying out this plan there are compiled by the Bureau lists of manufacturers who have indicated their willingness to supply material in accordance with selected Federal specifications and commercial standards, and to certify to purchasers, when requested to do so, that materials supplied by them are guaranteed to comply with the requirements and tests of the specifications and standards. This plan has already been applied to 575 Federal specifications and commercial standards, more than 22,000 requests for listing having been received from about 12,000 firms. Copies of these lists, as they are compiled, from time to time, are sent to all interested governmental purchasing agencies. This service to tax-supported agencies, which is rendered free of charge, tends to promote economy, in that a wider range of competitive bidding can be invited, and satisfactory material can be insisted upon.

---

(9) Letter Circular No. 256a. Obtainable from the National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C., without charge.

An analysis of the lists of "willing-to-certify" manufacturers shows that they contain the names of many progressive, wide-awake firms, irrespective of size, in all lines of manufacture covered by the specifications to which the certification plan has been applied.

It is to be understood, however, that the National Bureau of Standards can assure no responsibility as to whether any given shipment of goods actually conforms with the requirements of the specifications under which it was purchased. This fact can only be definitely confirmed by a subsequent laboratory examination. (See Directory of Laboratories below.)

The results to be derived from a wide-spread application of this plan is the general recognition that specifications form a logical and economical part of contracts between the buyers and the sellers.

#### Labeling Plan

It has seemed probable that some of the benefits derived by the large-quantity purchasers from using nationally-recognized specifications under the certification plan could be passed along to the "over-the-counter" buyer (the non-specifications-using public) by the application of a labeling plan, (10) based on certified compliance with nationally-recognized specifications "policed" by trade associations - not by the Federal Government.

---

(10) Outline of Labeling Plan. National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C. Free.

In accordance with the self-identifying, quality-guaranteeing labeling plan, a firm desiring to bring effectively to the attention of the "over-the-counter" buyer at the time of making a purchase, commodities which it is willing to guarantee as complying with the requirements of certain nationally-recognized specifications or standards, places on the individual commodities or their containers labels which definitely identify both the specification and the manufacturer or the trade association which holds itself responsible for the guarantee.

Certain manufacturers have stated that they are now using or planning to use quality-guaranteeing labels, or their equivalent, with goods manufactured to comply with Federal specifications for brooms, dental alloys, dry cells, fireproof safes, ink (writing, colored and indelible), library paste, lime, linoleum, lumber, paint, paper (correspondence, carbon, blue print), pipe, Portland cement, rope, soap, textiles, and wall board.

Although the use of labels on staple merchandise is intended primarily to aid small-quantity purchasers who cannot be expected to buy on specifications, it is beneficial also to large contract buyers, including public purchasers for States and local governments and public institutions, in that they minimize the amount of testing. It is not suggested that no tests be made for acceptance, but that the great bulk

of routine acceptance testing be eliminated, and tests be resorted to only at irregular intervals.

Directory of Laboratories

In accordance with the law, the National Bureau of Standards makes tests and carries out investigations for other Government agencies. Because of the large amount of this official work, it is impracticable for the Bureau to make tests for other groups or private individuals if existing commercial laboratories can do the work. To inform interested persons of the location of these laboratories and as an aid particularly to public purchasing agencies who are not equipped to make their own acceptance tests of commodities purchased on contracts based on specifications, the Bureau has compiled a directory of commercial testing and college research laboratories.<sup>(11)</sup> This directory contains a list of laboratories throughout the country, arranged, alphabetically, with indications of the types of commodities which they are prepared to test. The existence of this directory and the knowledge that tax-supported purchasing agencies can at any time call upon testing laboratories to test deliveries have induced many public purchasers to take full advantage of the specification-method of purchasing.

---

(11) National Bureau of Standards Miscellaneous Publication No. 125. Obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. Price 15 cents per copy.

---