

Obsolete Federal Specifications

By Miles Free, Director of Technology Services mfree@pmpa.org
and Jeff Costelloe, Specification Analyst, Republic Engineered Products

There are 19,116 cancelled or superseded commercial item descriptions, federal specifications and standards. Lucky you, that print that you have to quote is citing two or three of them. There are also 738 federal standards, as well as 5,610 federal specifications, and only a few not-so-helpful hits on Google if they show up at all.

The reform of federal government acquisition processes has resulted in the wholesale demise of entire classes of specs, standards and commercial item descriptions. MIL-STDs and MIL-Specs once numbered 35,000 in force in the early 1990s.

Standards For Procurement

The \$436 hammers and \$640 toilet seats are held up as poster children for a procurement system gone wrong. But the fact is the system evolved because the government had bona-fide requirements. However, meeting a government spec for chocolate chip cookies or canned apricots seems a bit excessive.

The use of these standards for procurement was estimated to add 30 to 40 percent of Department of Defense acquisition costs. But the downside was real in the case of all government MIL, fed specs and STDs. The need for ensured performance when lives are on the line was their reason for being. As one analyst put it, "they represent dollars paid now to save lives later."

The roots of the federal standards

and specifications can be traced back to the Spanish-American War, when supply problems, goods damaged in transport and equipment lost because of poor packaging contributed to the death toll of U.S. forces.

But specifications have been with us throughout history and our language is replete with phrases that owe their origin to a government-purchasing agent. "Lock, stock and barrel," originally coined by Sir Walter Scott in 1817, was adopted by a government buyer trying to buy muskets who learned too late that "rifle" could refer to just the rifle barrel.

"Sincerely," a word that many of us use on our routine correspondence, originated with buyers of marble for state buildings in Rome. The Latin original, "sin cera" translates literally to "without wax." (Wax was used to fill in the cracks of lesser-quality stone and give a false impression of luster.) Thus, a letter that was "sin cera" was one with the bare facts, unembellished and without wax.

There Goes Another Spec

It is 2004 and the federal government system's cancelled specs and standards outnumber those in force by almost 3:1. The people who were specs experts have retired or have been replaced or outsourced by private contractors. Almost every week, a part is inquired to a precision machining manufacturer somewhere citing some obsolete federal spec

or standard for material.

If you're lucky, someone on your raw material supplier's technical staff might have a note or a file on these, but many times they don't. Here are some sources to turn to for tracking down those elusive, out-of-date specs and standards:

- Your raw material suppliers. Their technical support staff might be able to help you.
- Online. Google might get you to a link that could lead you to another link.
- The Early Warning Project Group listings at either www.cihost.com/ewpg/mil-specs or www.cihost.com/ewpg/fed-specs.
- The government search site at apps.fss.gsa.gov/pub/fedspecs/index.cfm. Plan on spending some time there. With a search function that requires you to know that the spec is cancelled in order to be able to turn up a valid result, you will get to learn all of the combinations that a spec or standard might have until you get a result you can use.
- One of the electronic listings at these government search sites. Scroll through them alphabetically or numerically and hope you don't get a "Script Error" one page before your spec listing comes up.
- Save the accompanying chart on Obsolete QQS Federal Specifications. For hot-rolled and cold-finished carbon and alloy steel bars, your item can probably be found there.

Federal Specification	Cancellation Date	Title	Superseded/Replacement
QQ-S-624	25-Nov-74	Steel, Bar, Alloy, Hot Rolled and Cold Finished, (General Purpose)	ASTM A-304 & ASTM A-322 & ASTM A 108-03
QQ-S-630A	6-Jun-75	Steel, Bar, Carbon, Hot Rolled (Merchant Quality)	ASTM A-575 and ASTM A-663
QQ-S-631A	6-Jun-75	Steel, Bar, Carbon, Hot Rolled (Special Quality)	ASTM A-576 and ASTM A-675
QQ-S-633	30-Nov-65	Steel Bars, Carbon, Cold Finish and Hot Rolled (General Purpose)	ASTM A-29 & ASTM A-108 & ASTM A-576 & ASTM A-675
QQ-S-634	5-Dec-74	Steel, Bars, Carbon, Cold Finish (Standard Quality)	ASTM A-29 and ASTM A-108
QQ-S-637	1-May-80	Steel Bar, Carbon, Cold Finish, Standard Quality Free Machining	ASTM A-29 and ASTM A-108
QQ-S-764	8-Sep-75	Steel Bar, Corrosion Resisting, Free Machining	ASTM A-484 and ASTM A-582

As of June 1, 2004, ASTM A331 95 is canceled and rolled into ASTM A 108 03.

ASTM A331 was the successor to QQ-S-624. I have updated it to show A108-03 in its place.

Source Material: I confirmed using either the cancellation notice from Federal Supply Service or the listing in the VSMF Military Specifications Service Index, and double-checked it against the Index of federal specifications and standards online.