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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REGIONAL OFFICE
ROOM 1903 JOHN F KENNEDY FEDERAL BUILDING
GOVERNMENT CENTER
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02203

May 31, 1973

Brigadier General John McWhorter
Commanding General
U S Army Natick Laboratories
Natick, Massachusetts

Dear General McWhorter

The General Accounting Office (GAO) is reviewing the Government's standardization program and activities related to military and civilian supply items. As part of this program, the U S Army Natick Laboratories (NLABs) is responsible for the preparation and update of certain standardization documents, such as specifications, standards, handbooks, qualified product lists and other engineering records. NLABs found that in spite of its laboratory level review of new or updated documents, many errors still existed. About 16 4 man years is devoted annually to reviewing standardization documents. Of this, about 9 4 man years effort is directed towards documents previously reviewed. We believe an assessment of this problem is warranted. A solution to the problem and revision of the review function could result in a manpower savings which could be directed to other priority standardization work.

Each of the five laboratories at NLABs prepares and maintains standardization documents. In addition, each laboratory performs its own independent review of the documents prepared or revised by laboratory personnel. This work represents the remaining 7 man years.

NLABs Regulation 10-1 requires the Quality Assurance and Engineering Office (QAE) to perform an independent review of all standardization documents and recommend changes to the laboratories as necessary. Since 1961, the QAE Office has found many common errors in the standardization documents independently reviewed.

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in the laboratories. For example, some common technical errors are omission or redundancy of required data, incorrect data, discrepancies in data among various specification sections, incorrect drawings and figures, quality assurance and packaging errors. In addition, editorial errors such as misspellings, grammar and punctuation, incorrect or omitted references are consistently found. GAO does not believe that a repetitive review function is the permanent solution to the problem.

NLABS officials stated that they recognized the problem of inadequate technical quality of standardization documents at NLABS, and have made attempts over the years to correct the situation. For example, in May 1962 the QAE Office was requested to reemphasize the need to take action to administratively ascertain that coordinated technical reviews have been made within NLABS of all standardization documents. In April 1965, a NLABS official directed that laboratory man hours saved from a reduction of resources committed to another function be devoted to improving standardization document quality.

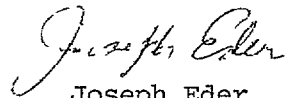
The Army Materiel Command in August 1970 emphasized the necessity for all its organizations, including NLABS, to maintain an effective Defense Standardization Program. We found that there is a backlog of standardization work at NLABS. This work, such as preparation of program analyses and performance of item reduction studies, was reported as not being adequately achieved because of inadequate resources.

We believe that the necessity to perform an independent verification of documents at two management levels reduces the effectiveness of the Defense Standardization Program. We also believe that the review function could be revised to eliminate repetitive efforts. The savings in manpower could then be devoted to other priority standardization work.

We suggest that NLABS assess the problems causing the common errors in the standardization documents. We believe such action would have a twofold impact on the standardization review function. Initially, the repetitive review could be reduced or eliminated and, subsequently, the potential would exist for streamlining the remaining review function.

We would appreciate a reply indicating what action you have taken on our suggestions and observations on the common errors in standardization documents and on the independent standardization document review function

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Eder".

Joseph Eder
Regional Manager