



NATO Codification System and NSN as Item of Supply Identifier

You know what NSN is and what it is good for? You can find the answer in this article where you can also learn some basic information about the NATO Codification System and especially about the benefits it brings to military logistics.

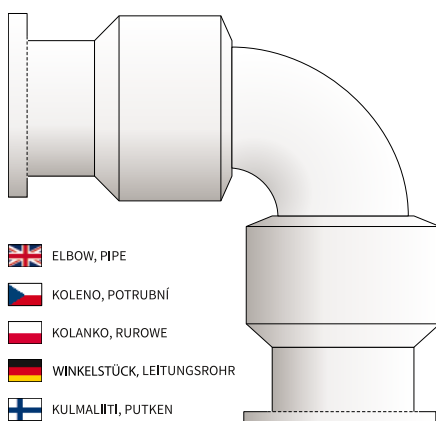
NATO Codification System

NSN stands for the NATO Stock Number. It is a thirteen-digit number used by countries participating in the NATO Codification System, which uniquely identifies so-called items of supply. The NATO Codification System, abbreviated as NCS, is a comprehensive set of international agreements, standards and procedures that create a single, internationally understandable system (language) for the identification, classification and numbering of items of supply, used by NATO armed forces, but also by some non-NATO countries – users of the NCS.

In the context of NCS, the term "item of supply" refers to an item of material, equipment, ammunition, etc., which is defined by its properties, so called characteristics, relevant to the user of the item, regardless of the manufacturer of the item.

To make the NCS intelligible for its users, the logisticians, each NSN is assigned a comprehensible name. In addition to English, each member country can translate the name into their own language to make it understandable and prevent mistakes. For example, the item with NSN 4730-16-005-6994 with the name "ELBOW, PIPE" is listed as

NSN 4730-16-005-6994



"KOLENO, POTRUBNÍ" in the Czech Republic, "WINKELSTUECK, LEITUNGSROHR" in Germany, "KOLANKO, RUROWE" in Poland, and "KULMALIITI, PUTKEN" in Finland. It is clear from the example that it is not a matter of mere translation, but of finding a technical equivalent.

This is one of the reasons why NCS is often referred to as the common language of logistics.

Benefits of the NATO Codification System and the use of NSN

A significant benefit is interoperability, the use of a common language of logistics. NCS facilitates seamless integration and cooperation in the area of material support for joint operations and coalition missions.

Equally important is the acquisition of data about purchased items of supply from their manufacturers and suppliers. In countries participating in the NCS, the Ministry of Defence always requests this data from their suppliers and attaches it to the corresponding NSN. Thus, an item introduced in the NCS contains not only the NSN but also information relevant to the users of the item and to its purchase. For each NSN, the manufacturer or supplier is specified, and if there are more than one, all of them are listed. This makes it easy for the acquisition department to find out who supplies a particular item, and it is easy to find a replacement for an item that is, for example, no longer available from the original supplier.

"Principle of national responsibility" and material identification using NSNs

When sharing data between countries participating in the NCS, the "principle of national responsibility" is applied, according to which the country of the manufacturer is responsible for the item codification. All other coun-

tries that register as users of the item receive codification data from the country that performed the codification, including updates that occur during the item's life cycle.

The unambiguous identification of material using NSNs is important for both material inventory and accounting purposes. Codifying items of supply based on their functional characteristics before assigning NSNs ensures that there are no duplications and multiplications in their identification. Therefore, it cannot happen that the same item is labelled with different identifiers in various parts of the organisation, which can lead to unnecessary wastage of money during procurement. Another negative consequence of ambiguous material labelling is unnecessarily high inventories, which also increase costs.

It is clear that the introduction of NCS and the consistent use of NSNs not only increase interoperability but also bring significant reductions in financial and material costs. As logistics in the armed forces consumes a significant part of the budget, substantial savings can be achieved by its more efficient management.

Not without reason is the NATO Codification System often referred to as the DNA of logistics. Its active use in military logistics yields numerous benefits. This is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that a number of non-NATO member countries, currently 32 states, have decided to voluntarily implement the NCS because they have evaluated it as beneficial.

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