

Reinventing Paint?

by

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No, the government is not reinventing paint—only the way paint is specified. But these changes are quite significant to the many team members who are involved in specifying paints for use at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects.

Providing guidance to Corps field engineers on optimal use of paints and other coatings is one element of research being conducted by the Corps' High-Performance Materials and Systems Research Program (HPM&S).

Within the scope of this research is the goal of ensuring that decision-makers are equipped with current information on materials selection and acquisition procedures.

This article focuses on recent changes in federal procurement procedures for paints (specifically common latex and oil-based paints) and outlines how these changes developed and how they are being implemented.

Initiative for change

During the past decade, many changes in paint specifications have occurred. Until the early 1990s, federal and military specifications were

the most commonly used methods of specification. Some of these specifications still exist and will continue into the foreseeable future. Others have been canceled in favor of commercial item descriptions (CIDs) or industry specifications.

The way the federal government procures things is dictated by the Federal Acquisition Requirement (FAR). This document fills volumes, but the basic philosophy is twofold. The government will purchase competitively, and it will purchase the least expensive product that will do the job.

This procedure assumes that specifications will be needed to accomplish these objectives, and it “rates” the types of specifications as follows:

- *Least desirable*—government specifications (such as federal and military specifications, e.g. TT-P-XXX and MIL-P-XXXX).
- *More desirable*—government performance specifications (CIDs, e.g. A-A-XX).
- *Most desirable*—industry specifications.

The FAR has been in existence for decades, but a change in the early 1990s required government agencies to report progress on using the more desirable specifications (CIDs, etc.) for the procurement of products. The philosophy may have been good, but at the time there were very few performance or industry specifications that met the needs of the painting industry.

For most of the federal specifications for common latex and oil-based paints, the preparing agency was the General Services Agency (GSA). In the mid-1990s, GSA took the initiative of replacing its federal specifications with CIDs and canceling the federal specifications. Since a CID is primarily a performance-based specification for which commercially available products exist, the result was that manufacturers no longer had to make a special product to meet specification requirements.

Another effect of the change was that all guide specifications using the federal specifications had to be revised to make use of the CIDs. In some cases the CID paints were so different from the old federal specification paints that entire paint systems had to be changed to require more coats or a different surface preparation.

In the Army guide specifications, the changes were accomplished with several change notices to guide specification CEGS 09900 and in the January 1998 revision of Guide Specification CWGS 09940 (the designation of which was later changed to CEGS 09965.) These documents made use of as many CIDs and industry specifications as were available to meet the painting needs.

In November 1998, several government agencies learned that GSA was planning to cancel all of the CIDs on which it was listed as the preparing activity because it no longer planned to use CIDs for its procurement. Available options were for the other agencies to take over

as the “preparing activity” on the CIDs or to find some other method of specifying the needed paints.

The search then led to Master Painters Institute (MPI), a commercial entity that had a series of specifications that could be used, and discussions were begun.

Master Painters Institute

MPI is an established Canadian company that has developed two lists of standards referred to as “Intended Use” and “Detailed Performance” standards. The company develops the standards, tests paints purchased in the local market, and maintains (on their Web site, www.paintinfo.com) a listing of products that meet the specification requirements.

The Detailed Performance standards contain a list of tests and requirements similar to CIDs. The Intended Use standards may contain a number of physical criteria (gloss, dry time, etc.) but depend largely on manufacturer’s data to identify the performance properties of the paint.

In a March 1999 meeting it was agreed by several agencies (including the Army and Navy) that MPI standards would be used in procurement documents to the extent that they serve the needs of the agencies.

It was a consensus of the agencies that the Detailed Performance standards would meet minimum requirements for procurement but that the Intended Use standards contain insufficient requirements to ensure satisfactory performance.

Currently, the Detailed Performance standards are largely latex and oil-based products for wood, masonry, drywall, and similar architectural materials. MPI has agreed to upgrade some standards from Intended Use to Detailed Performance in order to meet the additional needs of the agencies.

Revisions to Guide Specifications

Both of the Army guide specifications for painting (CEGS 09900, "Painting General," and CEGS 09965, "Painting: Hydraulic Structures") are currently being revised.

Work on updating the Army 09900 and Navy 09900 documents is being done cooperatively. The documents will make extensive use of the MPI standards and, to the greatest extent possible, the paint systems in the two documents will be identical. It is anticipated that the revised 09900 documents will be available in early 2001.

A draft of the 09965 document has been completed and is in the process of being formatted for official adoption and publication on the Internet. It will still reference one military specification, three CIDs, and several industry and formulation specifications. However, it will use MPI standards for all interior latex and alkyd paints, as well as for an exterior alkyd enamel.

Contract documents

Over the last 10 years or so, there have been numerous problems with contractor procurement of paint. The old federal and military specifications described good-quality products, but very few companies had shelf products that met all the specification requirements.

To fully meet contract requirements, contractors had to have special batches of paint manufactured for the project. This was both costly

and time consuming. As a result, some installations accepted shelf products in lieu of the required materials, which often resulted in inferior coatings.

Some installations omitted the government specifications completely and required the contractor to select from a list of three commercial products. This may have met the FAR requirements, but the practice unfairly excluded other manufacturers who market products that would be equally suitable for the purpose.

Use of the MPI standards has the potential to eliminate these problems. Any manufacturer can get products tested for a minimal cost.

Products manufactured by a small company and found to meet the requirements of a standard will be given consideration equal to that given to products manufactured by a large company. Contractors will be able purchase any appropriate product from the list MPI publishes on their Web site and use it without further testing.

Point of contact

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