

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER HEINZ A. ABERSFELLER, FEDERAL SUPPLY SERVICE, GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION; ACCOMPANIED BY GEORGE W. RITTER, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS AND QUALITY CONTROL; AND CHARLES TRAVIS, DIRECTOR, STANDARDS DIVISION

Mr. ABERSFELLER. Fine.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am Heinz A. Abersfeller, Commissioner, Federal Supply Service, and I have with me Mr. George W. Ritter, Assistant Commissioner for Standards and Quality Control. On my left, Mr. Charles Travis, Director of our Standardization Division.

On behalf of the Administrator of General Services, Lawson B. Knott, Jr., who has asked me to represent him at this hearing, I wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity afforded by your letter of June 15, 1967, to outline our program for the development of Federal specifications and standards. GSA, in its capacity as a supplier of items to meet the needs of Federal agencies, administers the Federal specifications and standards program. This includes the development and maintenance of Federal specifications and standards for items which we buy and the assignment of responsibility on a project basis to other agencies for the development of Federal specifications and standards commensurate with their technical competence and capacity to perform this function. Approximately 40 percent of the 5,000 existing specifications were developed by GSA. The other 60 percent were developed by other civil agencies and the Department of Defense.

Specifications are generally developed by initially establishing desired performance characteristics. Test methods are then developed by which the stated performance characteristics can be verified. Subsequent to the development of these draft specifications, producers and Government users are consulted, differences, if any, are resolved and the specification is then issued in final form. At this point it is important to point out that Federal specifications are of little or no value to the Federal Government unless accompanied by the ability to test the products involved to assure compliance with the requirements of the specification. Since testing is so essential to Federal procurement we believe that Federal specifications per se are of little or no value to consumers who generally cannot buy the products involved simply to test them.

This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that those consumers interested in quality rather than price must lean heavily on industry, manufacturers' and dealers' certification of compliance for products, preferably by citing as many do that an item meets or exceeds a Federal specification, an ASTM standard or other specification. We have noted on repeated occasions that manufacturers and distributors rely on this method in guiding the consumer. A good case in point is our recently published specification for safety standards. Automobile manufacturers have advertised that the vehicles they produce meet these standards and of course our testing and inspection procedures have verified this insofar as Government procurements are concerned.

Mr. Chairman, we wish to assure you and members of the committee, that it is our desire to cooperate with this subcommittee in every possible way to the extent of our capabilities and resources. In