

Notes from Multi-Agency Uniform Program Committee Meeting

During the week of January 22 – 26, 2007, the Corps NRM Uniform Committee met with their counterparts from the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in San Diego, California for the annual uniform meeting. Also in attendance were the Contracting Officer (NPS), the Contractor (VF Imagewear) and a representative of the National Park Police.

Representing the Corps were Mark Andreasen (NWD-C), Dean Bonifacio (LRD), Barbara Cooper (SPD), Michele Fromdahl (NWD-M), Ralph Gendron (NAD), Susan Haney (SWD), Sara Jernigan (SAD), Jeff Rose (MVD) and Jim Runkles (Committee Chair and co-COTR). Also in attendance was Mr. Steve Austin (HQ) who is the COTR.

For the past several years, the committee has requested comments from the field to ascertain how the uniform is being received. The comments were gathered and placed in an Excel document. (See attached.) The committee went over all 389 comments. The vast majority (220) of the comments dealt with individual uniform items. Suggestions were offered to add, remove, replace, bring back, and modify uniform items. To each comment, the committee drafted a response to explain what action was taken (or not taken) and why.

The issues raised are summarized below.

Contractor Website

While most comments were favorable concerning the contractor's website, there were a few issues which the committee discussed with the contractor.

- a. Women's sizes. There is a need to explain to the uniform wearers the difference between rise and inseam. Many of the sizes are offered in petite, regular and tall "rise". This refers to distance between the waist and the crotch. Inseam is the length of the trouser leg from crotch to hem. The contractor will put an explanation on the website to reduce confusion.
- b. Image size. To better see the item, the contractor has agreed to install a feature which will enlarge the item. This should be accomplished this summer.
- c. Shirts and Trousers. The images of all shirts and trousers will be rearranged to put the Class B items ordered on page one, and other items on the following pages.

Backorders

Some backorders are understandable; however the polo shirt, the work jacket and the fleece cap were all on backorder for long periods. The committee discussed these issues with the contractor.

- a. Polo Shirt. The polo shirt backorders were directed by the Corps. When the polo shirt was first available, the website did not provide a space for the title. This was corrected; however there were a number of different titles requested. The contractor waited for the Corps to provide a list of authorized titles. This has been corrected and polo shirts should be delivered soon.

- b. Work Jacket. The work jacket proved to be much more popular than anticipated by the Corps or the contractor. The Corps had estimated that the employees would purchase 400 jackets the first year. In reality, over 900 were ordered. To compound the problem, the manufacturer of the work jacket ran into a supply problem concerning the lining. It was no longer being produced. Permission had to be sought and received to modify the liner. This resulted in some backorders lasting over one year.
- c. Fleece Cap. The fleece cap was added to the program last year. Estimates were for some 400 units. The contractor supplied these, however, the sizing proved problematic. The sizes were split between small and large. The small was too small for most employees, so they requested the larger size. Plenty of smalls were available, but not the larges. The contractor has solved this with the addition of a medium size. Sizes are now available.
- d. Delays on all items. For a period of two weeks, the contractor was not sending any items out. This was due to a relocation of their Distribution Center. They moved this entire operation from Martinsville, Virginia to Henning, Tennessee. This move is now complete and shipments have resumed. NOTE: Employees who have saved shipping labels for the Martinsville center should destroy them. They all have VA on them. Everyone should now be utilizing the shipping labels with TN on them.

Uniform Items

- a. Duty Shirts. We received several comments about the buttons on the sleeves of the long sleeved duty shirt. They complained that sleeves were too tight. The committee discovered the buttons had been changed on the cuff when the new shirt was adopted last year. The committee discussed this with the contractor. They have agreed to modify the shirt cuffs at no cost to the government. These modified shirts will be phased in as stock allows.
- b. Polo Shirts. More comments were received concerning the polo shirts than any other single item. Comments ranged from praise for adding the shirt to the system, to disgust with the item and its price. The committee noted that the polo had been in the system for less than 3 months, and with very few shirts were actually in the field. We recommended that no action be taken until the shirt has had a full season of wear. We will address comments at the next meeting.
- c. Turtleneck. Several comments about the lack of quality of the turtleneck. Last year the committee adopted a higher quality turtleneck. This is being phased into the program.
- d. Duty Trouser. Two years ago, the contractor changed the hem on the duty trouser from a blind stitch to a “jeans-style” hem. This was done in response to comments from the National Park Service. Their employees often wear boots with hooks that would snag on the blind stitch and tear out the hem. We discussed this with the contractor. While it is possible that some of the Corps employees may have the same issue, the majority of personnel wearing the duty trousers are not wearing boots, or at least boots with hooks. The committee recommended and the contractor agreed to return the duty trousers

hems to the blind stitch. The cargoes, twills and brush trousers will continue to have the “jeans-style” hem.

- e. Ladies Trousers. The contractor has designed a female trouser that has a great deal of elastic at the waist which can lead to a “bunched” look. This style was developed to provide more flexibility for the female ranger, and works for some but not all females. The contractor is in the process of developing a newer style that may be more acceptable. Wear tests will proceed on this new item this year.
- f. Brush Pants. Many positive comments were received concerning this new work pant. There were however many complaints that the pants faded after washing. Some stated that the item faded in streaks after a single washing. The committee discussed this with the contractor. The contractor pointed out that the pants were 100% cotton which fades. The streaking is caused by the washer. These streaks will disappear after several washings. If the employees want a comfortable, 100% cotton item, they must expect fading.
- g. Shorts. As in recent years, there were several comments concerning the length of the shorts. The committee has been working with the contractor to redesign the shorts. This is in progress.
- h. Windbreaker. The windbreaker currently in the program was adopted a couple of years ago when the previous windbreaker was no longer being manufactured. The committee adopted the windbreaker used by the National Park Service. While this item fit the immediate need, the quality is such that it is not an item we wish to continue to supply. The committee has asked the contractor to investigate the possibility of a replacement.
- i. Ball Caps. We received several comments concerning the height of the ball cap. We investigated and found the item met the specifications in the contract. The committee has addressed this issue thoroughly. We understand that the tastes of those who wear ball caps run the gamut from a high crown to a low, fitted crown. We have recommended that we stay with the middle of the road on the ball cap, and not become slaves to fashion.

Other Items

- a. The committee received several comments concerning the materials being used in the program. Those commenting asked why we were not utilizing materials that are currently available in retail, and why we were not incorporating more modern styles and functions into the program. The committee is constantly working with the contractor to provide newer and better materials and colors for the uniform items. There are several mitigating factors that must be kept in mind when dealing with these issues. For the most part, these fall into two categories; price, and contract requirements.
 - a. Price. Whenever a new item is added into the system, the Corps has to make a decision as to how to incorporate it into the system. Some items can be phased in if they are the same price. If they are higher priced, the Corps must buy out or find some other avenue for getting rid of existing stock. This can prove to outweigh the benefits of a new item.

- b. Contract. The contractor is required to meet the specifications of the contract. These include the requirement to either Buy American, or use NAFTA countries for items. Many of the newer fabrics and items suggested are not manufactured in the US or NAFTA countries.
- b. Catalogs and Posters. It was pointed out that the contractor is sending out too many posters, and not enough catalogs. The contractor is meeting the specified amounts listed in the contract. The COTR will be recommending a modification to change this.
- c. Questionnaire. Some frustration was conveyed concerning the questionnaire sent out each year. The committee will be exploring the concept of working with the web masters of the NRM Gateway to capture and consolidate comments next year.
- d. Gore Tex Care. The committee has received numerous comments over the years concerning the “leaking” of the Gore Tex outerwear. This past year the contractor has performed multiple tests on the Gore Tex items in the program. The results have indicated that these items do not leak. The problems with the garments have been traced to the laundering of the items. The contractor is developing a series of instructions to aid the employees with this. A short synopsis of these follows.
 - a. Gore Tex needs to be treated annually with a DWR treatment. This can be acquired at Outdoor stores, REI, etc.
 - b. Gore Tex cannot be laundered with fabric softener, bleach or starch.
 - c. Do Not Use dryer sheets in the dryer as this clogs the pores in the membrane that allows body perspiration to escape, thus creating a “leak”.

The committee has also been working on the revision of ER/EP 1130-2-550, Chapter 8. A draft had been sent to HQ two years ago, however subsequent contract modifications have made many of the items listed in the EP obsolete. To that end, the committee has drafted a new ER that will not require modifications. At the same time, the committee is developing an NRM Manual to cover all the aspects of the EP. This manual can be modified as needed without the prolonged requirements of an EP.

This report has been compiled by the Committee Chair. If you should have any questions concerning anything herein, please address them to the undersigned.

James E. Runkles
NRM Uniform Committee Chair
541-374-4556