

GSA

A PARTNER IN WILDFIRE PROTECTION

INTRODUCTION

General Services Administration's Federal Supply Service has actively participated and supported the national wildfire suppression effort since the 1950's. This support is centered in the Southwest Supply Center located in Fort Worth, Texas and is mandated by Interagency Agreements between GSA and USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management. The Center manages and coordinates the various functions necessary for support of wildland firefighting operations and includes fire item specifications, purchasing, order processing, stocking, inventory management and transportation.

The GSA Fire Program Coordinator is also assigned to the Southwest Supply Center and is responsible for the overall operation of supply support and liaison duties for the wildland firefighting agencies. The Coordinator works with the Southwest Supply Center's division directors and other GSA staff located throughout the United States to resolve issues relating to procurement, engineering, requisitions, contract administration, inventory management and transportation.

There are approximately 283 items classified as fire items and are listed in the GSA Wildland Fire Equipment Catalog. These items include water handling equipment and supplies, fire line tools, fire shelters, protective clothing, canteens, field packs, sleeping bags, batteries, chainsaw chaps, first aid kits, goggles and safety glasses, gloves, and tents. Specifications for these items are developed and maintained by the U.S. Forest Service's Technology and Development Centers in Missoula, Montana and San Dimas, California. These centers keep up with the latest technology and materials available from the commercial market as well as standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). They use the information to improve on the quality and safety of the existing items. Input is provided by wildland firefighting agencies, including state forestry organizations. Items not covered by a Forest Service specification are normally covered by a federal or military purchase description. GSA has a Product Management and Technical Services staff at the Fort Worth center that keeps these purchase documents current and provides technical assistance to user agencies.

WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

At the end of the fire season – which is normally around the end of September – the Inventory Manager reviews demand data on each individual item and compares it against the same demand data for the previous five years. After the review, recommendations are made on stock levels necessary to support the next fire season. Meetings are held between the Inventory Manager, Director of Inventory Management and Customer Assistance Division, and the GSA Fire Program Coordinator, to discuss the recommended levels. The levels for items designated as “critical” are presented to U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management staff personnel for their review and approval. Once approved, the levels are loaded to each item record and the

buy program kicks into action. The system generates buys based on these levels and the Inventory Manager reviews each buy to ensure that quantities do not exceed monthly supply potential quantities established under terms of the contract. Purchases are scheduled so that deliveries will be staggered throughout the following months, with stock objectives being met by June 1st when fire activity normally begins to pick up.

HOW FIRE ITEMS ARE PROCURED

The Supply Acquisition Division plays a major role in the overall service provided by GSA to the wildland firefighting agencies.

All items are purchased in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulations. Most of the items that GSA procures for the firefighters are on indefinite delivery contracts established for periods of 2 to 5 years (inclusive of options). Estimated quantities are received from the Inventory Management Division and current item purchase descriptions are obtained from the Product Management and Technical Services Division. Contract specialists initiate procurement actions depending upon quantities, delivery times, specifications requirements, historical data and other factors. Solicitations are published electronically via <http://www.fedbizops.gov> to maximize competition. After receipt of bids/offers, contract specialists evaluate to determine the responsive, responsible bidders/offertory with reasonable pricing for award of contracts. Review factors include performance evaluation and facilities inspection, financial review, and any other criteria as deemed necessary by the contract specialist.

The majority of items procured for wildland firefighting agencies require first article inspection/testing by the U.S. Forest Service. GSA Industrial Operations Analyst personnel are responsible for inspecting items for visual conformance before shipment is made to the applicable Forest Service Technology and Development Center. Until first article samples are accepting by the U.S. Forest Service, the contractor/supplier cannot begin production of the item. The nature of these items warrants very stringent Forest Service specifications that must totally be adhered by the contractor/supplier.

The development and maintenance of Forest Service specifications is the responsibility of the two Forest Service Technology Centers. The Product Management and Technical Services Division of the Southwest Supply Center works close with these agencies and makes recommendations based on previous procurement history. From these specifications, the Product Management and Technical Services Staff, prepare purchase descriptions outlining exceptions, packaging, packing, marking, and pallet requirements as well as any special requirements that may apply.

The Product Management and Technical Services Division provide technical support to the procurement authority, customers and suppliers. This is vital in ensuring that the supplies and equipment purchased meet the requirements of the intended user. Much of the knowledge gained through technical assistance is documented and used in the preparation of future purchase descriptions.

Some items are purchased using Simplified Acquisition procedures (under \$100,000). These items are bought in small quantities and can normally be completed in 1 to 2 weeks

depending on the priority assigned to the order. Most of the purchases are delivered within 30 days; however, during a severe fire season, some items are so critical that they are procured over the telephone, a purchase order completed and the items delivered in the same day. Simplified Acquisition procedures may also be used to establish standing quotations or blanket purchase agreements.

EMERGENCY ORDERS

To insure an efficient and timely response to our customer's needs, fire items are stored at the Western Distribution Center, Sharpe Army Depot, French Camp, California, which is the closest GSA stocking point to the majority of fire activity within the United States. A few fire items are stored at the Eastern Distribution Center in Burlington, New Jersey. Emergency orders are accepted on a 24/7 basis, 365 days a year and can be delivered within 5 to 26 hours to most destinations within the United States. These orders are sent directly to the Inventory Management and Customer Assistance Division in Fort Worth via facsimile where each National Stock Number, customer address, and other vital information are verified. Orders for small quantity line items that meet emergency criteria can be submitted via telephone. During after hours and weekends, the customer sends orders directly to Stockton. Procedures regarding emergency orders are published in the GSA Wildland Fire Equipment Catalog and are also disseminated at meetings, conferences, and written notices. The Fire Program Coordinator is always available via cellular telephone or pager.

Truck carrier normally transports emergency orders for large quantities unless the customer specifies otherwise. Delivery time frames range from 5 to 26 hours, depending on destination and use of normal or premium transportation. Delivery to a couple of the national fire caches located in the eastern and southern part of the United States takes approximately 48 hours. Premium transportation costs are billed to the ordering activity. Normal transportation costs are already included in the cost of items.

Emergency orders submitted to Sharpe after office hours and weekends are coordinated through a local answering service which relays messages and telephone numbers to on-call Distribution Center personnel. In most cases, it is just a matter of minutes before Distribution Center personnel contact the customer and acknowledge receipt of the order.

Each National Stock Number ordered is processed through the Automated Locator System to determine stock location, weight, cubic dimensions, and units per pack. This information is annotated on the emergency order, GSA Form 3222. Simultaneously, estimates are made on the appropriate mode of transportation i.e. small package carrier, airfreight, less than truckload, truckload, expedited service, etc.

Orders are sent to the appropriate distribution point for stock retrieval. If the order is received during "off duty hours", labor is obtained from negotiated (AFGE) rosters. Orders processed during normal duty hours are processed by diverting warehouse personnel from their normally assigned task. During severe fire seasons, as much as 1700 hours of overtime are required to meet customer demands. While the order is being retrieved, accommodations for transportation (type, pick-up time, transit time, and delivery) are set up and all concerned (especially the customer) are advised to ensure that it meets their requirements. The customer is

also advised on what items are not available. At this point, all transportation documents are prepared and processed.

After the orders are completed, shipping information is recorded on the GSA Form 3222 and along with other applicable documentation, i.e. Government Bill of Lading, small package carrier tracking/tracing numbers, air bill numbers, etc., documents are facsimiled to the Fort Worth Inventory Management and Customer Assistance Division where accountability transactions are processed. Copies are also furnished to Quality and Inventory Control Branch at Sharpe for post-order entry monitoring.

GSA is committed to supporting this critical and highly visible program. During an active fire season, orders in excess of 1600 tons are received, processed and shipped to support on-going fires and replenishment efforts. Value can run from \$45M to \$70M. GSA supports federal and state wildland firefighting agencies throughout the lower 48 states and Alaska. As soon as fire season is over, preparations that begin last October, start all over again.