

The NATO Codification System



NATO Codification touches virtually every area of the defence supply chain. In practice, it addresses the challenge to correctly identify material, to prevent duplicates to keep the logistical footprint as small as possible, and to exchange complex technical data regardless of language barriers or geographical constraints.

Originally a purely NATO organisation, the codification system is now far larger than NATO itself. More than 60 nations belong to the system, which has become a common supply language and a prerequisite to any successful logistics operation.

The mission of the NATO Codification System (NCS) is to establish a global standard for identifying materials, therefore supporting NATO and fortifying multinational interoperability. The NCS guarantees that equipment, components, and military system parts are consistently named, described, classified, and given a unique identifier called the NATO Stock Number (NSN).

The role of the NATO Stock Number

Each Item of Supply is identified in the NCS by a unique 13 digit NATO Stock Number (NSN).



The NSN consists of three identifying parts:

- a 4-digit NATO Supply Classification Code (NSC), also known as "Group and Class" that categorizes the Item,
- a 2-digit Nation Code (NC) stating the country of origin,
- a 7-digit Item Identification Number (IIN),

Together, the NC and IIN form the NATO Item Identification Number (NIIN).



The importance of the NCAGE

An NCAGE is a 5-character code that identifies companies or entities in current or future business with governments or defense organisations. This code allows members of the NCS to determine who manufactures or supplies a specific item.

The NATO Supply and Procurement Agency (NSPA), as well as National Codification Bureaus (NCB) may allocate these unique 5-character codes to public and private organizations.

One place to find it all: The NMCRL

Each NSN and NCAGE created during the codification process is published in the NATO Master Catalogue for References of Logistics (NMCRL). The NMCRL is the only official NATO supply catalogue listing parts and providers.

As a predominant worldwide multilingual defense materiel database, the NMCRL is the main sourcing application for defense public and private entities.



The NCS governance

The NATO Allied Committee 135 (AC/135) is responsible for the success of the NATO Codification System which has thrived since 1958. Directly reporting to the CNAD (the Conference of National Armament Directors), the AC/135 gathers more than 60 national directors of codification bureaus to increase the effectiveness of the NATO Codification System and adapt it to its ever-changing environment.



The AC/135 community in November 2023

The National Codification Bureau of each country contributes to the excellence of the NCS. Individual NCBs are the sole agencies for all codification matters. These bureaux provide services or products both to their national military and to foreign agencies, defense forces and industry who use the NATO Codification System worldwide.

The NATO Supply and Procurement Agency (NSPA) is a NATO body and the hub of AC/135. It provides a highly qualified team responsible for running daily NCS operations. This includes everything from AC/135 secretariat support to NCAGE allocation and NMCRL subscription management.

The multiple benefits of using codification data and services

Studies carried out on behalf of the AC/135 identified a number of benefits and cost avoidance directly attributable to the operation of the NCS.

For national Ministries of Defense, the rigor and excellence of the codification system, both at home and in joint operations with other members of the NCS, promotes a common language in situations where a mistake could cost lives. Although the most important advantage of joining the NCS, there are other key strong benefits for both governmental and private entities.

Governments and defense organizations enjoy

- enhanced interoperability among their forces and those of Allies,
- simplified logistics,
- cost savings from the reduction of duplicate inventory,
- shorter re-supply times,
- lower purchase prices per item through purchasing larger consolidated volumes of items.

They can also leverage the system for better inventory management and planning along with their Logistics applications

Private companies benefit from reduced complexity in identifying products and suppliers, leading to:

- lowered time and monetary costs,
- increased opportunities for trade within the defense sector,
- having products coded with an NSN enhances a company's visibility in NATO's supply chain.

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