

SECTION I EQUIPMENT STANDARDIZATION

EQUIPMENT SPECIFICATIONS GUIDE

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I have had the pleasure during the past twenty years of working with a variety of customers and end-users in the governmental industry. It has always been interesting to me during that work to note the seemingly countless different ways individual agencies and highway departments approach the same task. In particular, the variation in procurement specifications can quickly tempt one to conclude that agencies never exchange information. Certainly that assumption isn't true. However, the whole area of procurement specifications and the need for some form of equipment standardization recently lead the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Committee A3C08, *Maintenance Equipment*, to investigate the question, "Isn't there a better way to do the job?"

Approximately two years ago, the Design Standards Subcommittee of TRB Committee A3C08 began a study of how different state highway departments and individual governmental agencies procured equipment. The results of that work were published in October 1991 in *Transportation Research Circular 381*, "How To Develop and Use Equipment Performance Specifications." Although many techniques are used in procuring equipment, it was discovered that agencies who were satisfied with their acquired products all consistently included five similar steps in their acquisition method. Conversely, agencies who were not satisfied with the results of their acquisition method normally missed one, two, or even three of the five steps.

The *Circular* details the Five Easy Steps To Successful Specification Writing and how they can be applied to developing a more successful acquisition program. The key steps reviewed include:

1. Understanding Job Requirements
2. Determining What's Most Important
3. Evaluate Equipment On-The-Job
4. Clearly Stating What Is To Be Purchased
5. Identify The Bid Award Criteria

The *Circular* also provides examples of specification wording for items such as product support and samples of performance specification writing that helps clarify the overall machine and supplier performance required by an agency and not simply the technical specifications of the equipment. The reaction from readers has been very positive and has helped some, both private and public, to improve their procurement methods. For those interested in taking a closer look at the *Circular*, copies are available from TRB.

Does this mean you now have all the answers? Certainly, the *Circular* fills an important need in being a good reference guide, but it can't answer every situation. In addition, printed material can become quickly dated in this rapidly changing technological world. Are there other ways to stay current and up-to-date? You bet! Electronic spread sheets and personal computers are certainly nothing new, but the application of user friendly, easily updatable, and inexpensive software bases to the world of specification writing adds some new dimensions you might enjoy seeing.

Various suppliers and manufacturers are continually working on better ways to help the electronic communication process and I would like to share one new development with you at this time. This particular computer program is available through John Deere, however, other manufacturers also have electronic spread sheet programs that can do similar functions. This particular program, however, is unique in its interaction with the user. For example, the program starts by offering a menu of subjects. Selecting from the menu quickly brings the user to appropriate areas of interest without the need of a detailed manual or a deep understanding of computers. Details on machine features, performance specifications, value analysis, acquisition choices, product support, and comparative specifications are quickly available at the touch of a key. Even better news, the information is updated three times yearly. Here's a possible sequence a user of the program might go through when investigating a backhoe loader:

- Selects Performance Specifications
- Selects Backhoe Loaders
- Reviews Proposed Specifications
- Reviews Specifications Compared to Various Manufacturers
- Selects Features & Benefits
- Reviews Different Areas of Machine
- Reviews Standard Equipment
- Reviews Optional Equipment
- Selects Acquisition Choices
- Reviews Leasing, Renting & Other Options
- Reviews Warranty & Extended Coverage Options
- Performs a Value Analysis Comparison

During the process, the user can refer to a word glossary for clarification of terms and can print information. For a copy of the *Circular* and/or the software program for specification writing contact the author at John Deere National Sales, 400 - 19th Street, Moline, Illinois 61265-1373.