

Transcript of video presented by Harlan Erker, Manager, Base Supply Center Program, NIB
View this video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyQLv5Ec2s8> [dated 11-19-2011]

AbilityOne Program Product and Essentially the Same (ETS) Overview

1. Introduction

My name is Harlan Erker. I'd like to talk to you today about the AbilityOne Program, the products offered within the AbilityOne Program, how you can and why you should support the AbilityOne Program.

2. Program Mission

The AbilityOne Program is a Federal program designed to provide employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. These employment opportunities are provided through the provision of goods or services to the federal customer.

3. AbilityOne Program Structure

The AbilityOne Program is provided oversight by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission which oversees National Industries for the Blind and NISH who are the two central governing nonprofits that oversee approximately 600 nonprofits across the country who employ people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

4. Why this is [Program] Important

Today there are over 18 million working-age adults across the country who are blind or severely disabled. Of this population, over 70% are unemployed -- representing over 12 million Americans who are without jobs. Within the Program, there are over 47,000 people who are blind or significantly disabled.

5. Benefits to the Federal Customer

With over 70 years of experience partnering with the Federal customer, the AbilityOne Program has been able to develop over 3,200 commonly used office and janitorial products designed for the Federal user. This relationship has allowed agencies within the AbilityOne Program to design products with the Federal user in mind specifically compliant with any procurement regulations. Additionally, these products are created by a highly motivated workforce of Americans who are blind or have other significant disabilities.

6. AbilityOne Product Lines

There are two primary product lines within the AbilityOne Program. The first is commodity products; which consists of general office products, writing instruments, cleaning and janitorial supplies, hardware and paints, food service and operations supplies. There are also niche and textile products which are safety and medical products and military specific products.

7. Office Supplies

Office supplies have been a staple of the AbilityOne Program product offering for over 50 years. The most recognizable office product offered under the AbilityOne Program is writing instruments. Today, there are over 90 writing instruments offered under the AbilityOne Program designed to meet the needs of any Federal user. In addition to writing instruments, there are several other office supplies offered under the AbilityOne Program including filing supplies, computer accessories, mailing labels, wall boards, easels, steno pads and many more.

8. Cleaning Products

Cleaning products are another recognizable AbilityOne product with trash bags, hand sanitizers, mops, brooms, and other types of cleaners being offered within the AbilityOne Program.

9. “Green” Products

Because of the relationship between the Federal customer and the AbilityOne Program, products in the AbilityOne Program have been designed with specific needs of the Federal buyer in mind, such as Executive Order 13,101, the initiative for Greening the Government. Some of the products designed with this greening initiative in mind include biodegradable and compostable products, recycled content products, and environmentally friendly cleaning agents.

10. Custom Products

In a continued effort to best meet the needs of the Federal customer and at the same time expand the employment opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities, several agencies within the AbilityOne Program have developed customized products. These are typically customized versions of products already manufactures by an agency, such as wall clocks, classification folders, customized writing instruments, and customized portfolio pads.

11. Safety & Personal Care

Safety and personal care items are also offered under the AbilityOne Program. Such products include medical kits and devices, fire hoses, flashlights, and gloves.

12. Military Unique Products

The AbilityOne Program has a long standing history of supporting the United States military through the production of products essential to the mission of today’s warfighter. Such products include the Army’s Improved Physical Fitness Uniform, the Airman’s Battle Uniform, the Army Combat Uniform, the Air Force’s Physical Fitness Uniform, as well as several other component parts used by today’s warfighter.

13. What is Essentially the Same (ETS)?

Now that you have an understanding of the broad product lines offered under the AbilityOne Program, it is important to understand how you can support the Program. Paramount in this is an understanding of what “essentially the same” is and how you can recognize ETS items. For most products offered under the AbilityOne Program there is a commercial product that has been deemed equivalent in fit, form, and function. When such a product exists, it is required by the Federal customer to buy the AbilityOne product. If you ever have a question whether or not a product is available through the AbilityOne Program, you can access the Procurement List which contains all AbilityOne products at www.abilityone.gov.

14. Helping with ETS Compliance

Being ETS compliant requires effort by the AbilityOne Program as well as you, the Federal customer. The AbilityOne Program makes an effort to ensure all commercial distributors maintain ETS-free product offerings. The AbilityOne Program also works with GSA to install preventative measures to ensure the end user does not see non-compliant products. What you –the Federal customer—can do is make sure you buy AbilityOne products that are listed on the Procurement List. This can be done by purchasing from authorized AbilityOne distributors. When purchasing products, look for the AbilityOne logo and please report any non-compliant products to National Industries for the Blind. Please become an advocate for the AbilityOne Program.

15. The Regulation

While we want you to support the AbilityOne Program for the high quality products offered we also want you to understand that it is also part of the Federal Acquisition Regulations. FAR part 8.7 states that the Federal customers are requirement to purchase items that are on the Procurement List. Prices for these products are established by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission and products are manufactured by AbilityOne participating nonprofit agencies employing people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

CFR 51.6 outlines procurement guidelines when specification changes need to be made to an AbilityOne product or the AbilityOne Program cannot meet the need of the Federal customer.

16. When to Buy AbilityOne Products

It is important to support the AbilityOne Program at any dollar value – whether it is a box of pens or a large order of office products – you are still required to buy the products offered under the AbilityOne Program.

17. Where to Buy AbilityOne Products

In attempt to make buying under the AbilityOne Program as easy as possible, there are several channels that are available for purchasing AbilityOne products. Such channels include GSA Global Supply, GSA Advantage, DoD Email, over 140 base supply centers on Federal locations, multiple award schedule holders, and www.abilityone.com.

18. Customer Satisfaction

The AbilityOne Program recognizes that customer satisfaction is crucial in achieving our mission of creating jobs for people who are blind or severely disabled.

19. Contact Information

If there is a product not offered that you would like to see supplied, please contact the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, National Industries for the Blind, or NISH.

On behalf of the AbilityOne Program and the over 42,000 Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities who are employed under the Program, I'd like to say thank you for taking time out today to learn how you can continue to support the AbilityOne Program.