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NTIS SECTION 515 INFORMATION QUALITY STANDARDS

▶ BACKGROUND:

As required by Section 515 of the [Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001](#) (Public Law 106-554 Appendix C), the Office of Management and Budget has issued [guidance](#) (Federal Register, February 22, 2002 at pp. 8452-8460) to all Federal Agencies for:

- ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of information they disseminate,
- providing a way for affected persons to challenge and request correction of information products that do not meet the OMB guidelines, and
- reporting on complaints received and their disposition.

The Department of Commerce has in turn [published guidance](#) for its own operating units. It provides appropriate standards for corporate or general information disseminated by units of the Department, directs the units to describe other types of information that are or are not subject to information quality standards, and calls for the development of an administrative mechanism for correcting errors.

NTIS's guidelines implement and fulfill these requirements. They may be revised periodically, based on experience, evolving NTIS requirements and concerns expressed by the public.

Covered information disseminated by NTIS will comply with all applicable OMB, DOC, and (these) NTIS Information Quality Guidelines.

In implementing these guidelines, NTIS acknowledges that ensuring the quality of information is an important management objective that takes its place alongside other NTIS objectives, such as ensuring the success of NTIS missions, observing budget and resource priorities and restraints, and providing useful information to the public. NTIS intends to implement these guidelines in a way that will achieve all these objectives in a harmonious way.

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▶ GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF NTIS' MISSION AND ITS INFORMATION PRODUCTS:

The National Technical Information Service (NTIS) is the Federal Government's Clearinghouse for scientific, technical information (STEI) produced by or for Federal agencies (15 U.S.C. 1151 et seq. and 3704b). A 1954 Comptroller General decision (34 Comp. Gen. 58) agreed that this could also include economic and market information. Thus, STEI also embraces business-related information.

Accordingly, NTIS' regulations define STEI to include basic and applied

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research that results from the efforts of scientists and engineers in any medium as well as information that bears on business and industry generally, such as economic information, market information and related information (15 C.F.R. Part 1180.2). It can embrace matters beyond the restricted field of applied science and mechanical arts but should bear a direct relationship to business, industry or technology.

NTIS's collection now numbers close to three million items from Federal sources and complementary STEI from selected foreign and domestic sources. NTIS receives no appropriations and sustains its operations through the sale of such documents to the public and by providing related information-dissemination services to other Federal agencies.

By law, Federal agencies are required to send a copy of their STEI products to NTIS, where they are cataloged, organized, preserved and disseminated to business, industry, academia and the general public (15 U.S.C. 3704b-2). NTIS has issued regulations guiding Federal agencies in meeting their responsibility to send STEI to NTIS (15 C.F.R. Part 1180). NTIS also actively reviews Federal Web sites to locate Federal STEI products that agencies may have disseminated to the public without sending NTIS the required copy. NTIS does not create its own STEI.

NTIS does not conduct or fund scientific research, does not create or fund original STEI products, and does not use third-party STEI to develop new or improved STEI products. Virtually all of the information it creates on its own and disseminates to the public relates to its products, operations and capabilities.

Accordingly, these guidelines describe the applicable standards for:

- STEI information products created or funded by other sources, and
- Any corporate or general information disseminated by NTIS.

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▶ **STANDARDS FOR "STEI" PRODUCED BY OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES**

Standards for Quality and Objectivity:

For purposes of Section 515, NTIS considers all STEI products to be information produced and released by the sponsoring Federal agency, which is solely responsible for quality and objectivity, as those terms are defined in OMB's guidelines and the implementing standards of the source agency. As such, it is considered to be information that does not represent the views of the National Technical Information Service. NTIS will include a disclaimer on or with these products, as appropriate, informing users that the agency that created or funded the information product is solely responsible for its contents. This is consistent with the Department of Commerce's own guidelines which treat research data, findings, reports and other materials published or otherwise distributed by employees of Commerce operating units that are identified as not representing the operating unit's views as outside the scope of the guidelines.

NTIS will include this disclaimer on all products sent to

customers on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the product was created by the source or was entered into the NTIS permanent collection.

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Standard for Utility (i.e., Whether to Add a Report to the NTIS Collection):

Although NTIS defers to the issuing agency or component with respect to quality, objectivity and integrity, it does make a judgment as to utility when it adds an STEI report to its permanent collection. The Department's guideline for utility is that information should be helpful, beneficial, or serviceable to its intended users, or support the usefulness of other disseminated information by making it more accessible or easier to read, see understand, obtain or use.

NTIS considers this to be the appropriate standard of utility for including an STEI report to its collection. Consistent with the broad definition of STEI, NTIS considers "intended users" to include not only the scientific and technical community, but any persons concerned with issues such as how to allocate research and development resources, how and where to locate and organize production facilities, how to identify market opportunities, and similar business-related issues that are related to STEI.

NTIS will include this disclaimer on all products sent to customers on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the product was created by the source or was entered into the NTIS permanent collection.

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Standard for Integrity:

NTIS takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that STEI disseminated to the public is safeguarded from improper access, modification or destruction, commensurate with the foreseeable risk and magnitude of harm. Paper reports will continue to be maintained in a secured facility.

Beginning in 1997, NTIS began a process of scanning all new STEI materials into electronic image for storage and reproduction as a document is ordered. This electronic information adheres to the standard set out in Appendix III, "Security of Federal Automated Information Resource," OMB Circular A-130; the Computer Security Act; and the Government Information Systems Reform Act. This is the standard adopted by the Department of Commerce.

In addition, NTIS has entered into a formal arrangement with the National Archives and Records Administration to provide it with a duplicate microfiche set of all reports coming into the collection since 1964 on an ongoing basis. Thus, NTIS has a back-up plan to restore most of its collection in the event its main collection is damaged or destroyed.

NTIS will include this disclaimer on all products sent to customers on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the product was created by the source or was entered into the NTIS permanent collection.

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STANDARDS FOR INFORMATION PRODUCED BY NTIS:

As previously noted, NTIS' mission is to disseminate STEI. From time to time, NTIS may also disseminate corporate or general information. This is defined in Departmental guidelines as non-scientific, non-financial, non-statistical information, such as program and organizational descriptions, brochures, pamphlets, education and outreach materials, newsletters, and other general descriptions of its products, operations, and capabilities. NTIS does disseminate its annual financial report, but this is prepared by an outside independent auditor under contract with the Department's Inspector General and is in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.

This information is not expected to have a genuinely clear and substantial impact, at the national level, on major public policy sector decisions. Accordingly, it is not considered to be influential information within the meaning of the Department's guidelines. Nevertheless, NTIS will strive to ensure that all corporate or general information about its activities disseminated on or after October 1, 2002 conforms to the Department of Commerce's and OMB's quality guidelines in all respects.

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PROCEDURE FOR CORRECTING ERRONEOUS INFORMATION

Because erroneous STEI can have serious consequences, NTIS will refer all requests for correction to the source agency, including other operating units of the Department of Commerce, by providing the requester with a contact name and number if is not indicated on the information product. NTIS will do this as a matter of course whether or not the requester has suffered harm.

NTIS' customers requiring assistance are currently linked to an [index](#) page that provides various categories of help. NTIS will add a new heading "Quality Issues" which will take the customer to an appropriate page providing information on who to contact regarding the quality issue. NTIS will maintain a record of the request for submission to the Department as part of its required reports to OMB. We will also consider other appropriate links.

If the perceived error is contained in an information product created by NTIS (i.e., corporate or general information), requests for correction should be addressed to:

Office of the Associate Director for Customer Services,
5285 Port Royal Road, Room 1300,
Springfield, VA 22161 or

sent to the Quality Problems Help Desk.

No showing of harm is required, but the requester should be as specific as possible in describing the product and why it is erroneous or otherwise fails to conform to the applicable guidelines.

The Associate Director for Customer Services will refer the request to the appropriate office for evaluation and determination of what corrective action, if any, will be undertaken. This will be based on analysis of how significant the error is, timeliness, and cost. Corrective action may include immediate correction or replacement, revision of subsequent products, and issuance of errata sheets.

The Associate Director or head of the office making the determination will let the customer know of the disposition within 60 days. If the requester is not satisfied, the Deputy Director will consider appeals made within 30 days.

Appeals should be addressed to the
Deputy Director,
National Technical Information Service,
5285 Port Royal Road,
Springfield, VA 22161.

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