

SUMMARY: THE NASA LOW COST PROGRAM

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NASA announced a policy of achieving low costs through standardization in 1973. The first step toward implementation of this new policy was the establishment of a Headquarters office (called Low Cost Systems Office) to manage NASA's Low Cost Program. The staffing of this new office was almost completed by the summer of 1974.

The Low Cost Systems Office has organized its activities in three categories: Standard Equipment, Standard Practices, and Business Practices. To carry out its program, the LOW Cost Systems Office has organized a NASA-wide program involving all the NASA Field Centers, the various elements of NASA Headquarters, and the major NASA aerospace contractors.

The mechanism established to accomplish the NASA-wide participation is the use of NASA Inter-Center Working Groups -- some permanent and others ad hoc as needed. These Working Groups include whatever expertise is required for the identification, evaluation, and planning of cost-saving programs. Since getting maximum return for each NASA dollar is the objective of each individual program within NASA, the Low Cost Systems Office's primary function is to serve as an active catalyst in this process, and to implement cost-saving programs which can only be achieved by multi-program participation.

Thirteen items of spacecraft flight equipment (primarily at the component level) have already been declared standard, cataloged, and advertized. Several dozen other items (components, subsystems, and entire systems) are currently under study as potential cost-saving standards. Intense effort is currently underway to determine the advisability of multi-mission use of entire spacecraft buses and major subsystems. Standardization efforts are also underway in various program and business practices. These include specifications, drawing requirements, work break-down structure, testing, risk assessment, acquisition process, procurement strategy, personnel motivation, manpower utilization, and improved project management. Once a standard has been declared by NASA, the use of an alternative non-standard (hardware or practice) is permissible only through an established waiver procedure.