Opportunistic IUID Marking Using the ILO RAG Process

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Automating the Repair Parts Analysis (RAG) process has helped not only FISC Norfolk, but all of the ILO Sites

"Opportunistic marking" is the incorporation of IUID marking into normal, everyday, Department of Navy (DON) business processes, such as the Integrated Logistics Overhaul (ILO) process. The ILO process is a central point for inventory and replenishment of inventory for Navy ships. As such, it is perfect for opportunistic marking, because all items are offloaded from the ship and physically counted during the inventory. By marking the IUID -required items during these inventories, no special effort is required to find and pull items just to mark them. Therefore, marking costs are reduced to be near the expense of the labels that are applied to the items.

Because it is DON policy to use opportunistic marking whenever possible, the Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center ILO facility in Portsmouth, VA requested support for IUID marking from Commander Fleet and Industrial Supply Centers (COMFISCS). As part of this support, COMFISCS decided to automate the Repair Parts Analysis (RAG) process being performed at FISC Norfolk. As part of the automation, IUID marking would become an option within the process, which precluded the need to build a separate, standalone IUID process for the RAG team to perform. The RAG process was chosen for automation because, as a mostly manual (pencil and paper) process, it was slow and susceptible to human error.

Therefore, COMFISCS created a software module that uses Intermec handheld computers (equipped with imagers) and a central server ("data repository"). Once implemented, the automated RAG process provided FISC Norfolk the ability to mark IUID items, increased the speed of the RAG process, and improved the quality of data coming out of the process. Furthermore, it quickly became apparent that the handheld scanners introduced into the process could be used for all inventory activities—not just during IUID marking. As already mentioned, prior to the automation of the process, inventories were performed by hand (pencil and paper). Once the inventory count was done, the RAG team then manually entered data into the existing systems. Obviously, this process often resulted in transcription errors. It was discovered that using the handhelds to scan, read, and enter inventory information not only saves time, but also reduces transcription errors. Furthermore, the use of handhelds enables electronic data transfers from system to system. In addition, the handhelds can read linear barcodes that are already on items. This means the handhelds can be used for inventory (counting), further increasing speed and reducing errors by using automated information technology (AIT) even where IUID is not required.

The ILO RAG software was so well received at the FISC Norfolk ILO site that it has been requested and implemented at all of the other ILO sites (Norfolk, Groton, Kittery, Jacksonville, Puget Sound, San Diego, and Pearl Harbor). The software used at the Norfolk site will be modified slightly to adjust for differences among the sites, resulting in a standardized RAG process across all of the ILO sites.

This project has been so successful that the sites are hoping to implement this same sort of solution throughout all of their processes. RAG is only one piece of the ILO process. If all of the pieces could be automated and IUID enabled, then the ILO as a whole would be that much better, as speed and accuracy would be increased across the board and even more items would get IUID marked.

About the Author

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