

carriers and contractors. If a carrier or contractor forwards a check for less than the amount demanded, review the carrier's arguments for reducing liability to determine if they are acceptable. If the third party's basis for reducing liability is acceptable in the light of all evidence, deposit the check and dispatch the unearned freight letter, if applicable. Mark the front upper left-hand corner of the file as "CLOSED."

(2) *Third party offers of settlement.* If a carrier or contractor offers to settle the claim, review the carrier's arguments for reducing liability to determine if they are acceptable. If the third party's basis for reducing liability is acceptable in light of all evidence, inform the carrier that the offer is accepted, but that offset action will be initiated if a check for that amount is not received within 45 days. If a check in the amount acceptable to the Government is received, deposit it and dispatch the unearned freight letter, if applicable. Mark the front upper left-hand corner of the file as "CLOSED." If a check in the proper amount is not received within 45 days, send the request to NAVMTO, Norfolk (or appropriate contract officer) for offset action (see §751.32 of this part).

(3) *Unacceptable third party checks and offers of settlement.* If a third party's basis for denying liability is not valid, respond to that carrier or contractor. Return unacceptable checks. Explain the reasons for not accepting the check or offer, and request the amount that is justified under the circumstances in the light of all the evidence. If a release was included, amend the release to the revised amount and sign, date, witness, and return it. Warn the carrier or contractor that the claim will be forwarded for offset action if a check for the amount justified under the circumstances is not received within 45 days. Suspend the file for 45 days and if a check in the proper amount is received, deposit it and dispatch the unearned freight letter, if applicable. If a check in the proper amount is not received within 45 days, request NAVMTO, Norfolk (or appropriate contract officer) to take offset action.

(4) *Third party denials of liability.* Upon receipt, review the carrier or con-

tractor's basis for denying liability in the light of all the evidence.

(i) *Acceptable third party reasons for denial.* Mark the front upper left-hand corner of such files as "CLOSED."

(ii) *Partially acceptable and unacceptable third party reasons for denial.* If the carrier or contractor's basis for denying liability is acceptable only in part or is completely unacceptable, follow the procedures in subparagraph (3) above, requesting the amount that is justified under the circumstances in the light of all the evidence. If a response is not received within 45 days, or if the third party's reply is not responsive, request NAVMTO, Norfolk (or appropriate contract officer) take offset action as described above.

(b) *Depreciation.* In determining payments to claimants, the depreciation rates from the Allowance List—Depreciation Guide are used. In determining third party liability, however, a different depreciation guide, the Joint Military/Industry Depreciation Guide is used instead. In most instances, the depreciation rates are the same in both guides, and claims personnel are not required to consult the Joint Military/Industry Depreciation Guide or alter the depreciation taken on items prior to dispatching demands. If, however, a carrier or contractor objects to the depreciation rate utilized for certain items, consult the Joint Military/Industry Depreciation Guide and use the depreciation rate found in that guide if it differs from the rate in the Allowance List-Depreciation Guide.

§751.31 Common reasons for denial by carrier or contractor.

The following are common reasons given for denial of an entire claim, or for individual items on a claim. Each reason for denial is followed by a short discussion of the validity of such a denial.

(a) *The carrier alleges that valid exceptions were made at the time of pickup from the NTS facility.* When a carrier provides an exception sheet it contends was made at time of transfer, this exception sheet must bear the signature of a representative of the NTS facility. Without a signed exception sheet there is no evidence that the NTS facility was made aware of these exceptions

and given the opportunity to confirm or deny the alleged condition of the items in question. The burden of proof is on the carrier to provide the valid exception sheet and establish its freedom from liability.

(b) *The carrier denies liability for missing or damaged item packed in cartons because it did not pack the shipment and the cartons did not show outside damage.* When a carrier accepts a shipment in apparent good order, it is responsible for damage to packed items, unless it can prove that the packing was improper and was the sole cause of the damage.

(c) *The carrier contends that the mildew damage occurred in NTS and not during its transport of the shipment.* Mildew formation is more likely to occur in NTS than in transport. Unsupported by evidence, however, an allegation that mildew formation occurred during NTS does not rebut the established prima facie case of a carrier liability. A carrier must prepare an exception sheet and note any mold or mildew damage when the items were picked up from the NTS facility. The burden of proof is on the carrier to show that it was free from negligence and that the damage was due solely to the formation of mildew or mold during the NTS storage.

(d) *The carrier claims that damage is due to "inherent vice."* Although the carrier may allege that damage was due to "inherent vice," the mere allegation of "inherent vice" is insufficient to relieve the carrier of liability. The burden of proof is on the carrier to establish that an "inherent vice" existed and that it was the sole cause of the damage claimed. Since the carrier can rarely establish this burden of proof, denial due to "inherent vice" is seldom acceptable.

(e) *The carrier contends that it was denied the right to inspect.* Often a carrier will state that it made several attempts to make an inspection, but the shipper failed to keep the appointment. If such a case exists, the proper procedure for the carrier to follow is to contact the claims office for assistance in accomplishing the inspection within a timely manner. A carrier's efforts to obtain the inspection should be documented in the file by claims personnel. Lack of an inspection alone, however,

does not relieve the carrier of liability and is insufficient to rebut a well-established prima facie case of liability.

(f) *The carrier denies liability on missing items because the items do not appear on the new inventory made at pickup from the NTS facility.* When a carrier picks up a shipment from NTS and chooses to prepare a new inventory, it must use identical or cross-referenced numbers. If an article such as a chair or a lawnmower is missing, it must be indicated as "missing" on the new inventory. Whether or not a new inventory is made, an exception sheet must be prepared and the missing articles must be noted thereon. To relieve the carrier of liability, both the new inventory and the exception sheet must be signed by representatives of the NTS facility and the carrier.

(g) *The carrier denies liability due to "act of God."* An act of God is an event that could not have been prevented by human prudence. It is generally seen as an occurrence in which human skill or watchfulness could not have foreseen the disaster. The burden of proof is on the carrier to establish that an "act of God" existed and that it was the sole cause of the damage claimed. Since the carrier can rarely establish this burden of proof, denial due to an "act of God" is generally not acceptable. The carrier cannot avoid liability if it has been negligent in exposing the goods to potential danger or if it failed to take reasonable steps to reduce the extent of the injury once the danger was discovered.

(h) *The carrier contends that the claimant's repair estimate is excessive and that its own repair firm can do the job cheaper.* A claimant has the right to select a repair firm provided the cost is reasonable and not in excess of the item's value. The carrier is liable for the reasonable cost of repairing damaged merchandise that includes labor, material, overhead, and other incidental expenses incurred in reconditioning or putting the goods in salable condition. If the carrier did not provide the claims office with an acceptable, lower estimate to use in adjudicating the claim, and if the claimant's estimate is reasonable, then the carrier is liable for the amount paid the claimant.

(i) *The carrier contends that liability should have been predicated on the agreed weight of a sofa and not a hide-a-bed.* This argument only applies when carrier liability is based on weight. At the time the inventory is prepared, the carrier's driver must establish whether a sofa is merely a sofa, or one that converts into a bed. Failure to properly identify the item on the inventory does not relieve the carrier of liability for the greater weight of a sofa bed.

(j) *The carrier argues that it is not responsible for warpage, rust, etc., due to climatic changes.* This argument does not relieve a carrier of liability unless the carrier offers substantial evidence to show that the damages resulted solely from unusual circumstances beyond its control, as with an "act of God," or that it occurred while the property was in the hands of another contractor, as reflected upon a valid NTS exception sheet. The burden of proof is on the carrier to establish that the damage was not due to its negligence and that circumstances beyond its control were the sole cause of the loss. Because the carrier can rarely establish this, denial due to "climatic changes" is rarely acceptable.

§751.32 Forwarding claims files for offset action.

(a) *General.* Claim files are forwarded with a recommendation for offset action when 120 days have passed since a demand and a response has not been received from the carrier or contractor. Files are also forwarded for offset action when an impasse is reached. An impasse occurs when legitimate efforts to collect the fully justified amount demanded have reached a standstill and the carrier has no valid basis for denial. Prior to forwarding files for offset action, claims personnel must ensure that timely notice has been given, that all necessary documents are included, and that the demand and any correspondence were mailed to the proper carrier or contractor at its correct address. When applicable, claims personnel must also ensure that an unearned freight packet is included.

(b) *Claim files forward to local contracting offices.* Claims forwarded to local contracting offices for offset action include claims involving local

moves and DPM shipments in which the origin and/or destination contractor is determined to be liable. When the contractor fails to reply to a demand within 120 days or fails to make an acceptable offer, the file should be forwarded to the local contracting office with a request for offset action.

(c) *Unjustified denials and inadequate settlement offers by carrier or contractor—*

(1) *GBL carriers.* If a GBL carrier or insurer has refused to acknowledge or respond to a demand within a reasonable time (usually 30 days), if the claims investigating officer considers a valid claim to have been denied or not adequate settlement offered, or if settlement has been delayed beyond 120 days (see §751.32(a)), the claim shall be forwarded to the NLSC activity serving the geographical location recommending that set-off action be taken against the carrier or contractor. The 120-day period begins to run on the date initial demand is made on the carrier. The NLSC activity shall review the file and if the carrier liability is correctly computed, forward a copy of the GBL, copies of the DD Forms 1843 and 1844, SCAC code, and final demand on carrier to the Commanding Officer, Naval Material Transportation Office, Code 023, Bldg. Z-133-5, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA 23511 directing set-off action against the carrier or contractor.

(2) *Nontemporary warehousemen.* If a warehouseman or insurer has refused to acknowledge or respond to a claim within a reasonable time, if the claims investigating officer considers a valid claim to have been denied or no adequate settlement offered, or if settlement has been delayed beyond 120 days, the claim shall be referred to the NLSC activity serving the geographic location recommending set-off action be taken against the contractor. The 120-day time period begins to run on the date the initial demand was made. The NLSC activity shall review the file and if the warehouseman's liability is correctly computed, forward the file to the appropriate MTMC Regional Storage Management Office for set-off.

§751.33 Unearned freight packet.

(a) *Preparation.* An unearned freight packet should be prepared when the