

# Inspecting one *stitch* at a time

Matthew Montgomery | DCMA Public Affairs



*Left: Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, reviews the processes used by ReadyOne employees by examining their records and asking them questions about their job.*

*Right: Maria Jimenez, ReadyOne Industries quality manager, and Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, review the process controls in place and inspect the work of one of ReadyOne's blind employees. (Photos by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)*

**E**nsuring uniform items meet quality standard requirements is a job with an immediate impact on the warfighter, and a job Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialists take very seriously.

Allowing defective uniforms to make it to the field is not something the DCMA team takes lightly, said Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist. "If a particular defective garment is shipped I feel like I'm responsible, even though I don't see 100 percent of the product. It goes back to making sure the right processes are in place, effective and being followed."

Arrieta inspects military uniforms at ReadyOne Industries located in El Paso, Texas. The company supplies the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps with multiple items, ranging from everyday uniform pants to cold weather jackets.

The company is part of the AbilityOne program — a federal initiative to help people with disabilities find employment. According to their website, the vision is "to enable all people who are blind or living with significant disabilities to achieve their maximum employment potential." This is done by working within a national network of more than 600 nonprofit agencies that sell products and services to the government.

"I no longer see workers with disabilities, now I see them as workers with abilities," said Arrieta. "They inspire me to ensure the contractor is shipping compliant products to our uniformed personnel."

Although ReadyOne is a nonprofit organization under the federal initiative, Arrieta said they are held to the same Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR 52.246-11) quality standards as commercial garment manufacturers.

**"We have specific critical, mandatory inspections on the factory floor which are outlined for the products in a Quality Assurance Letter of Instruction."**

— Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist

"Requirements in the contracts outline our responsibilities, regardless of the company," said Arrieta.

The company is one of the larger producers under the AbilityOne program, which mandates 75 percent of direct labor must be performed by disabled individuals, said Tom Ahmann, ReadyOne Industries president and CEO. "We have more than 1,200 employees working in

our facility producing various military uniform items.”

A large portion of the workforce in the facility speaks Spanish and Arrieta knows communication is the key to ensuring the quality of the end product. This is where his ability to speak Spanish comes in handy. “Many times I communicate with them in Spanish to make sure they understand the technical side of their job,” said Arrieta. “It is beneficial because it is sometimes easier to communicate and understand issues of a technical nature in the language they are most comfortable with.”

The former employee of a major denim pant company has many years of garment experience he uses to ensure the warfighter receives a quality product, but it is not a job easily done alone. For this reason, Arrieta regularly imparts his knowledge of garment manufacturing with his coworker, Alex Luna, DCMA quality assurance specialist.

“Coming into the garment industry, I realized quickly how it is a very different commodity from what I’ve worked in the past,” said Luna, who’s worked in various programs ranging from tooling to



*Alex Luna, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, perform a random inspection on a sampling of uniform items prior to shipment. If more than the allowable number of mistakes is found during this inspection, the entire shipment is sent back to the contractor to be fixed. (Photo by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)*

complex systems. “The garment industry is unique because of the nuances, but what remains common is breaking it

down to the processes.”

According to the QASs, quality management systems are the most important part of the program and the place where they begin their work. To ensure DCMA is fully integrated into the process, Arrieta and Luna attend the contractor’s regular Tuesday quality meetings where issues are discussed and problems are resolved.

“Several years ago when I took over, the DCMA El Paso team chief and I agreed it should be a partnership, and DCMA should see everything we see – the peaks, the valleys, the good and the bad,” said Ahmann. “I would much rather have team members than spend time fighting over issues.”

An important part of the process review for the quality team is making sure there

*Left: Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, inspects stacks of cut material and the processes involved before they are sent to be sewn onto uniforms. The material pieces are future pockets for uniform pants and tops. (Photo by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)*



Right: Jose Arrieta, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, reviews the process as a ReadyOne employee inspects a large roll of uniform material. Uniform material arrives at ReadyOne Industries in rolls which must be cut down into smaller pieces before being turned into uniforms. During this stage of the process, defects are marked with a yellow piece of tape to insure they don't make it into the final product. (Photo by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)



Jose Arrieta (left), Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, and Maria Jimenez (right), ReadyOne Industries quality manager, review the process controls in place and inspect the work of one of ReadyOne's blind employees. ReadyOne is part of the Federal AbilityOne program which mandates 75 percent of direct labor must be performed by individuals with disabilities. (Photo by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)

is a system in place for management to communicate issues with the workforce and ensure they are corrected. Being a part of the weekly meetings and integrated into the process makes this part of the DCMA job easier said Arrieta.

"Everything that happens on the production floor is communicated all the way up to the president – the way you would expect it to be handled," continued Arrieta.

Ahmann said it is not always the case with industry, but he looks at the DCMA team as an asset and not a hindrance. "DCMA is very much a part of our process," said Ahmann. "They are out there doing floor assessments and reviews. We are lucky DCMA has an expert here with experience in the apparel industry – something unusual and greatly appreciated

and respected."

"It doesn't mean we always agree, but we work to determine the best ways to proceed," continued Ahmann. "In the end, we look at them as partners in this process. Anytime we've called them for help, they've been right there to assist with getting resolution."

ReadyOne has a number of separate contracts, each with different requirements outlined by the customer. The DCMA team approaches each contract in a similar manner. A contract technical review is conducted and requirements and critical areas are highlighted to ensure the team knows where to place extra emphasis. Arrieta said physical in-process inspections are a big part of any contract.

"We have specific critical, mandatory inspections on the factory floor which

are outlined for the products in a Quality Assurance Letter of Instruction," continued Arrieta. "We go as thoroughly as possible and necessary, depending on the type of operation and how critical they are to the overall product."

Although physical inspections of the product are important, Arrieta said it isn't where the team has the most control. "Our process reviews are more important than anything else because it is where we have the most influence -- prevention versus reaction" said Arrieta. "We start from the quality management system and look at the processes they have in place."

"Once we review their system we ask for evidence of the process being done correctly," continued Arrieta. "From there, we go to the actual location where the data is coming out and review and validate to make sure it is being done correctly."

Before final shipment, based on requirements stated in the contract, the team performs a random inspection on a sampling of uniform items with a very strict eye. "If we find more than the allowable number of defects based on the requirements, the entire shipment is rejected and the contractor re-inspects all garments and then re-submits shipment to DCMA," said Arrieta. "To me, every single suit, every single stitch, means a lot because at the end of the day it is supporting the warfighter," said Arrieta. 