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## "Non-Depository" or Not: An Examination of the Designation of Non-Depository Titles in the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*

Steven D. Zink

The *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* includes citations to various government publications not distributed to federal depository libraries by the Superintendent of Documents. For the most part these elusive publications represent titles which are produced in regional government printing facilities or by private contractors for a government agency. Although this distinction alone does not preclude distribution to depository libraries, the sheer lack of available copies has frequently resulted in *only* an entry in the *Monthly Catalog*.<sup>1</sup> The sole distinction in the *Monthly Catalog* entries between these non-depository titles and the publications distributed by the Superintendent of Documents is that the depository publications are distinguishable by an item selection number and a black dot (•). The black dot simply indicates that the title was available for distribution to deposi-

tory libraries and that, at the very least, regional depositories, as required by law, have a copy of the publication. The item selection number is even more crucial. The nearly 5,500 current item numbers represent all of the possible categories of publications available which selective depository libraries may elect to receive. For example, item number 17 represents the *Yearbook of Agriculture*. If a depository would select that item number, it would annually receive the *Yearbook of Agriculture*. Therefore a depository is capable of establishing a selective profile to suit users' needs much like a library would with an approval plan. Absence of these two elements indicates that the publication was not available for distribution to depository libraries. In an effort to have as complete a collection of government publications as possible, many depositories have sought to acquire some or all of these non-

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depository publications. For the past thirty years the most effortless means of obtaining these titles has been through a subscription to the Readex Non-Depository Microprint Collection. Since 1953, through an agreement with the Library of Congress, the Readex Corporation has been locating and converting into microprint all government publications listed in the *Monthly Catalog* but not distributed through the Superintendent of Documents depository library program.

In late 1981 the Government Publications Department of the University of Nevada-Reno (a regional federal depository with a collection exceeding one million documents) undertook a study of this service by attempting to acquire these non-depository publications by means other than through subscription to the Readex Non-Depository Microprint Collection.<sup>2</sup> One unexpected finding was that the placement of the item selection number and black dot data elements in the *Monthly Catalog* entries was far from completely accurate.

As a part of the analysis, the entries of the first seven issues of the *Monthly Catalog* for 1981 were monitored and requests were sent to the agencies authoring the publications for a copy of the non-depository titles listed. A request for each publication was also submitted to the Library of Congress' Documents Expediting Project using its special request service.

As solicited non-depository publications began to be received and subsequently shelved in the department, it became clear that many duplicated depository publications were already on the shelves. After careful checking and re-checking, it was discovered that of the 234 non-depository titles listed in the January through July 1981 *Monthly Catalog*, 94 (or 40 percent) of all the non-depository titles had in fact already been received through the depository library program.\* Thus 40 percent of the titles designated in the *Monthly Catalog* as being non-depository (by the absence of the black dot) were, in

fact, received on a depository basis (see table 1). The original number of erroneous citations was in actuality somewhat higher, but the Government Printing Office subsequently discovered five entries which were in error and noted that corrections should be made to the *Monthly Catalog*.<sup>3</sup>

These errors in the *Monthly Catalog* have a number of serious consequences for the users of government publications. Perhaps the greatest concern connected with these omissions is the most obvious. Librarians in hundreds of depositories that do not subscribe to the Readex Non-Depository Collection tell their patrons, when searching through the *Monthly Catalog*, that the library could only possibly own those publications received on a depository basis and cited with a black dot. Hence, 40 percent of the time such an assertion for a complete depository would have been incorrect if the *Monthly Catalogs* covered in this study had been used. The patron would never have utilized the materials readily available on the library's shelves.

Consequences of these errors also afflict subscribers to the Readex Non-Depository Microprint Collection. The basis for inclusion of titles in the Readex Non-Depository Collection is the absence of the black dot in the *Monthly Catalog*. When the black dot and item number are mistakenly deleted from an entry for a depository title, the patron will be led to believe that the library only has a copy of the publication in microprint, thus limiting its circulation and, in many instances, its usefulness to the patron. If the citation is taken from a *Monthly Catalog* of the past two or three years, the patron will be told that the library does not even own a microprint copy due to the current time lag in receipt of the Readex microprint.

The error in failing to accurately place the item number and black dot in the *Monthly Catalog* citation for depository titles is not without its fiscal considerations. Depository libraries purchasing the

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\*The depository status of certain titles was double-checked for accuracy by Roberta Scull against the holdings in the Government Documents Department at Louisiana State University.

TABLE 1  
ACCURACY OF NON-DEPOSITORY TITLE DESIGNATION  
IN THE MONTHLY CATALOG

| Monthly Catalogs | Total Titles Designated as Non-Depository | Titles Actually Non-Depository | Titles Actually Depository | Percent Erroneously Not Designated as Depository |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Jan. 1981        | 6   | 4                              | 2                          | 33   |
| Feb. 1981        | 9   | 6                              | 3                          | 33   |
| March 1981       | 30  | 22                             | 8                          | 27   |
| April 1981       | 67  | 34                             | 33                         | 49   |
| May 1981         | 22  | 11                             | 11                         | 42   |
| June 1981        | 26  | 15                             | 11                         | 42   |
| July 1981        | 74  | 48                             | 26                         | 35   |
| Total            | 234                                       | 140                            | 94                         | 40   |

Readex Non-Depository Microprint Collection will receive and pay for those titles incorrectly indicated as non-depository in the *Monthly Catalog*. In times of tight budgets, such needless duplication of depository titles in microprint is disturbing. Based on the Readex subscription price of over \$2,000 for the non-depository publications in the 1980-81 fiscal year, a consistent 40 percent error rate would have resulted in over a \$900 expenditure for duplicated depository titles in microprint. Multiplying the cost of this unfortunate duplication by the number of depositories subscribing to the Readex Non-Depository Collection makes these errors, collectively, very expensive.

One question that naturally emerges out of a study of non-depository publications is why there are today *any* non-depository publications in the *Monthly Catalog*. The basis for the traditional listing of non-depository publications was that only a single copy of each title, required for cataloging and classifying, was received by the Government Printing Office and thus distribution was impossible.<sup>4</sup> The problems inherent in an agency supplying too

few copies or even only one copy for distribution to depository libraries should not pose a problem today. Given the size of the current Government Printing Office's microfiche program (GPO estimates that it will distribute 53,000 different titles in microfiche in 1982),<sup>5</sup> it stands to reason that when the Government Printing Office receives a copy of a title for cataloging and inclusion in the *Monthly Catalog*, it could make a microfiche copy for distribution to depositories. GPO has the capability to do this. Without question, current non-depository documents would receive more widespread use at far less expense than is presently the case. If all non-depository materials currently noted in the *Monthly Catalog* cannot be integrated into depository distribution, it is imperative that tighter quality control be instituted to curb the grievously high error rate observed in designating which materials are depository or non-depository. Not only are such errors costly, inconvenient, and a disservice to the documents-user community, but they undermine confidence in the reliability of the entire *Monthly Catalog*.<sup>6</sup>

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