

Marking Inks

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Jeff Champneys –
Project Manager, ATK Thiokol



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Durable Inks Help Ensure Rocket Function

ATK Thiokol (Edina, MN) manufactures everything from bullets to the reusable solid rocket motors (RSRM) that have launched every space shuttle since the program's maiden flight in 1981.

To ensure that each RSRM functions perfectly, flight after flight, the company pays close attention to its processes throughout initial production, postflight inspection, transportation, storage and reassembly. This includes weight-checking the equipment used to handle the rocket's many reusable components.

Once each piece of equipment passes inspection, it is marked with color-coded ink, so operators will know it has been cleared for use. However, this creates a secondary problem, because the ink constitutes a possible source of paint flecks, which can become lodged in an RSRM during reassembly.

To ensure the rockets aren't contaminated, ATK Thiokol uses inks and marking equipment from Dell Marking Systems Inc. (Ferndale, MI). The company chose Dell inks after putting them through a series of tests to see how they stood up to moisture, temperature extremes and scuffing.

"We subjected Dell inks to every abuse we could think of," says Jeff Champneys, project manager for RSRM materials, commenting on the testing process. "[The inks] were found to be exceptionally durable....They provide long-lasting traceability, no flaking, chipping or contamination, and they provide safe handling of RSRM hardware."

Today, ATK Thiokol uses a number of different Dell inks in concert with Dell's PB-6 inspection markers and the PB-6T applicator tip. In use since 2003, the Dell inks have performed so well that Dell was recently recognized by ATK Thiokol with the company's award for excellence.

