

FAR 52.204-21

FAR 52.204-21 requires basic security controls for contractor information systems that process, store, or transmit federal contract information.



What it is

U.S. FAR 52.204-21 — Basic Safeguarding of Covered Contractor Information Systems is a federal cybersecurity regulation that establishes minimum security requirements for information systems used by contractors handling federal contract information (FCI). Its primary purpose is to ensure the protection of sensitive government data from unauthorized access and disclosure.

Issued and enforced by the U.S. Federal Government, specifically under the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), this clause applies to all federal contractors and subcontractors who process, store, or transmit FCI. The regulation mandates a baseline set of controls focused on access control, incident reporting, system monitoring, and information protection, supporting broader cybersecurity and compliance initiatives within the government contracting sector.

At a glance

PUBLISHER U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) General Services Administration (GSA) National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)	TYPE Regulation	VERSION 2016
EFFECTIVE June 15, 2016	DOMAIN Cybersecurity	FAMILY NIST Special Publications
REGION United States	INDUSTRY Government & Public Sector	ADOPTION MODEL Regulatory Compliance
IMPLEMENTATION COMPLEXITY Moderate		

Source: <https://www.acquisition.gov/far/52.204-21>

Why it matters

- **Strengthen cybersecurity governance** Establish clear security roles, access controls, and oversight to protect federal contract information across organizational systems.
- **Enhance regulatory compliance** Support adherence to federal data protection requirements, reducing the risk of contract non-compliance and associated consequences.
- **Improve data protection practices** Implement baseline technical and administrative safeguards to minimize unauthorized access and exposure of sensitive information.
- **Increase audit readiness** Facilitate visibility into the security posture of systems handling federal contract information, supporting internal and external compliance assessments.

How SmartSuite supports FAR 52.204-21

Basic Safeguarding Control Library

Structure the required safeguarding controls defined in FAR 52.204-21 with mapped owners and responsibilities.

Covered Contractor Information Governance

Track systems and environments storing or processing Federal Contract Information (FCI).

Access Control and Authentication Governance

Manage user authentication, authorization policies, and system access governance.

System Configuration and Protection

Track system hardening, malware protection, and patch management across contractor systems.

Vendor and Subcontractor Security Oversight

Monitor subcontractor systems handling FCI and ensure safeguarding requirements flow down.

Federal Contract Compliance Reporting

Provide dashboards showing safeguarding control implementation status and readiness for federal contract reviews.

Common framework mappings

CMMC 2.0

DFARS 252.204-7012

FedRAMP Rev. 5

ISO 27001:2022

NIST CSF 2.0

NIST 800-171 Rev. 3

NIST 800-53 Rev.5

PCI DSS 4.0.1

SOC 2

Official resources

FAR 52.204-21 Basics

Defines basic safeguarding requirements for contractor information systems under U.S. federal contracts.
acquisition.gov/far/52.204-21

Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Overview

Provides an overview of the Federal Acquisition Regulation system including FAR 52.204-21.
acquisition.gov/far

FAR Guidance by GSA

Outlines guidance on implementation and compliance with FAR requirements by the General Services Administration.
gsa.gov/policy-regulations/regulations/federal-acquisition-regulation-far

FAR Council Publications

Describes publications and resources issued by the FAR Council related to contractor compliance.
acquisition.gov/far-council

Frequently asked questions

What is FAR 52.204-21 used for?

FAR 52.204-21 establishes a baseline set of cybersecurity controls to protect Federal Contract Information (FCI) handled by contractors. Its primary purpose is to reduce the risk of unauthorized access or disclosure of sensitive government data managed on contractor information systems.

Is compliance with FAR 52.204-21 required?

Yes, compliance with FAR 52.204-21 is mandatory for all federal contractors and subcontractors that process, store, or transmit FCI as part of a contract with the U.S. federal government. It is a regulatory requirement embedded in federal acquisition contracts.

Who does FAR 52.204-21 apply to?

FAR 52.204-21 applies to organizations that contract with the U.S. federal government and handle FCI in their information systems, regardless of company size. This includes both primary contractors and subcontractors at any tier.

What controls and documentation are required by FAR 52.204-21?

The regulation requires implementation of 15 basic security controls, covering areas such as access control, authentication, physical protection, incident reporting, and system monitoring. Organizations should also maintain documentation evidencing their compliance posture, policies, and procedures for safeguarding FCI.

How is FAR 52.204-21 implemented within an organization?

Implementation begins by identifying information systems that process FCI, then applying the required security controls to those systems. This includes creating and enforcing access policies, securing physical facilities, monitoring systems, and establishing incident response protocols.

How does FAR 52.204-21 relate to other cybersecurity frameworks?

FAR 52.204-21 serves as a foundational layer of security and is closely aligned with more comprehensive frameworks such as NIST SP 800-171. Organizations often integrate FAR 52.204-21 controls into broader compliance programs to meet additional requirements like the Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC).

How would SmartSuite support FAR 52.204-21?

SmartSuite facilitates FAR 52.204-21 compliance by providing tools to map and manage required controls, track risk mitigation efforts, and organize evidence collections. The platform supports audit readiness with centralized documentation, automated reporting, and real-time dashboards to monitor compliance status across the organization.

License included / downloadable: Yes FAR 52.204-21 is published in the U.S. Federal Acquisition Regulation by the U.S. government (GSA/DoD/NASA) and is publicly available on official government websites. License included with platform

Full framework page and mappings: smartsuite.com/frameworks/us-far-52-204-21-basic-safeguarding-of-covered-contractor-information-systems