

# NASA Federal Regulations

This article presents an overview of the federal regulations that must be adhered to by NASA products. The article covers COPPA, 508 accessibility, metatagging, and guidelines for the distribution of e-products.

## 1. COPPA

Effective April 21, 2000, the Federal Trade Commission established the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) to give parents control over what information is collected from their children online and how such information may be used. The rule applies to:

- Operators of commercial web sites and online services directed to children under 13 that collect personal information from them.
- Operators of general audience sites that knowingly collect personal information from children under 13.
- Operators of general audience sites that have a separate children's area and that collect personal information from children under 13.

The following excerpts are the major components with respect to COPPA compliance. To view the COPPA rule in detail, go to <http://www.coppa.org/>.

- a. An operator must post a privacy policy on the home page of the web site and link to the privacy policy on every page where personal information is collected.**

The link to the privacy notice should be clear and prominent. The operators may want to use a larger font size or a different color type on a contrasting background to make it stand out. A link in small print at the bottom of the page or a link that is indistinguishable from other links is not considered clear and prominent. The notice should be clearly written and understandable; it shouldn't include unrelated or confusing information. It must state the following information:

- The name and contact information (address, telephone number, and e-mail address) of all operators collecting or maintaining children's personal information through the web site or online service. If more than one operator is collecting information at the site, the site may select and provide contact information for only one operator, who will respond to inquiries from parents about the site's privacy policies. However, all of the names of the operators must be listed in the notice.
- The kinds of personal information collected from children (such as name, address, e-mail address, hobbies, etc.) and how the information is collected, such as directly from the child or indirectly through cookies.

- How the operator uses the personal information. Uses may include notifying contest winners or making the information publicly available in a chat room.
- Whether the operator discloses information collected from children to third parties. The operator must disclose the kinds of businesses in which the third parties are engaged, the general purpose for which the information is used, and whether the third parties have agreed to maintain the confidentiality and security of the information.
- That the parent has the option to agree to the collection and use of the child's information without consenting to the disclosure of the information to third parties.
- That the operator may not require a child to disclose more information than is reasonably necessary to participate in an activity as a condition of participation.
- That the parent can review the child's personal information, ask to have it deleted, and refuse to allow any further collection or use of the child's information. The notice also must state the procedures for the parent to follow.

**b. An operator must provide notice about the site's information collection practices to parents and obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting personal information from children.**

The notice to parents must contain the same information included on the notice on the web site. The notice to parents must be written clearly and understandably and not contain any unrelated or confusing information. The notice should outline the operator's intent to collect personal information from the child and that the parent's consent is required for the collection, use, and disclosure of the information. The notice should also inform the parents of means that they can provide consent. An operator can use several methods to notify a parent, including sending an e-mail message directly to the parent or a notice by postal mail. The operator can obtain verifiable parental consent in a number of ways, which differ depending on how the personal information is used:

- **Internal uses.** Operators may use e-mail to get parental consent for all internal uses of personal information, such as marketing back to a child based on his or her preferences or communicating promotional updates about site content, as long as they take additional steps to confirm that the parent has consented to the disclosure. Additional steps may include a postal letter or phone call.
- **Public disclosures.** When operators want to disclose a child's personal information to third parties or make it publicly available, such as in a message board or chat room, they must use a more reliable method of consent, including:
  - Getting a signed form from the parent via postal mail.
  - Accepting and verifying a credit card number in connection with a transaction.

- Taking calls from parents from a toll-free telephone number staffed by trained personnel.
- E-mail accompanied by digital signature.

If all identifiable information is removed from postings in monitored chat rooms, and the information is deleted from the operator's records, the operator does not need to get prior parental consent.

- **Disclosure to third parties.** An operator must give a parent the option to agree to the collection and use of the child's personal information without agreeing to the disclosure of the information to third parties.

There are several notable exceptions to the parental consent provision, which allow operators to collect a child's e-mail address without getting the parent's consent in advance. These exceptions include many popular online activities for kids, including contests, online newsletters, homework help, and electronic postcards.

Prior parental consent is not required when:

- An operator collects a child's or parent's e-mail address to provide notice and seek consent.
- An operator collects an e-mail address to respond to a one-time request from a child and then deletes it.
- An operator collects an e-mail address to respond more than once to a specific request, such as a subscription to a newsletter. In this case the operator must notify the parent that it is communicating regularly with the child and give the parent the opportunity to stop the communication before sending or delivering a second communication to a child.
- An operator collects a child's name or online contact information to protect the safety of a child who is participating on the site. In this case the operator must notify the parent and give him or her the opportunity to prevent further use of the information.
- An operator collects a child's name or online contact information to protect the security or liability of the site or to respond to law enforcement, if necessary, and does not use it for any other purpose.

It should be noted that an operator is required to send a new notice and request for consent to parents if there are material changes in the collection, use, or disclosure practices to which the parent had previously agreed. For example, an operator who has obtained parental consent for a child to participate in contests must seek additional consent if interested in offering the child enrollment in a chat room.

- c. **Provide parents access to their child's personal information and the opportunity to delete the child's personal information and opt out of future collection or use of the information.**

At a parent's request, operators must disclose the general kinds of personal information they collect online from children (for example, name, address,

telephone number, e-mail address, hobbies) as well as the specific information collected from children who visit their sites. Operators must use reasonable procedures to ensure they are dealing with the child's parent before they provide access to the child's specific information. These methods include:

- Obtaining a signed form from the parent via postal mail or facsimile.
- Accepting and verifying a credit card number.
- Taking calls from parents on a toll-free telephone number staffed by trained personnel.
- E-mail accompanied by digital signature.
- E-mail accompanied by a PIN or password obtained through one of the verification methods above.

## **2. 508 Accessibility**

Section 508, created as an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act in 1998, requires that federal agencies' electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities. The rationale behind 508 is to provide multiple means of providing information, enabling disabled people to access and use information as easily as people without disabilities. The intention of 508 is also to provide disabled people with new learning opportunities and to foster the development of technologies that will support a learning environment. All federal agencies that develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology must comply with 508. Academic institutions are also part of the 508 accessibility community, as they fuel the research and development of 508 technologies.

Some accessibility issues that should be addressed by web developers include the following considerations of the disabled audience:

- They may not be able to see, hear, move, or may not be able to process some types of information easily or at all.
- They may have difficulty reading or comprehending text.
- They may not have or be able to use a keyboard or mouse.
- They may have a text-only screen or a slow Internet connection.
- They may not speak or understand fluently the language in which the document is written.
- They may be in a situation where their eyes, ears, or hands are busy or interfered with (e.g., driving to work, working in a loud environment, etc.).
- They may have an early version of a browser, a different browser entirely, a voice browser, or a difference operating system.

(Retrieved Aug. 2, 2004, from <http://www.w3.org/TR/1999/WAI-WEBCONTENT-19990505>.)

NASA webmasters have assembled an informational checklist and web site specifically to assist NASA and other federal webmasters in making their content 508 compliant. To see the checklist, visit <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/webmaster/accessibility/index.html>.

### 3. Metatagging

Metatagging is the process of embedding labels or tags about the content within the content to theoretically improve and refine the relevance and precision of a search.

Metadata is information about the data that encodes the content. It is analogous to the information in library catalogs that helps to locate books about a particular subject or by a particular author. The catalog is not the book itself, but the information about the book to improve the efficiency of a search.

Metadata refers to a method of resource description to locate Internet offerings. It documents features of the content and quality of the dataset (content) but does little to document the actual content. Therefore, although metatagging may expedite a search, it does not rank the quality of the content. The search engine usually functions in this capacity.

Metatagging probably does not improve generic search engine results as most search engines, such as Google, Fast, Excite, and Lycos, ignore all metatags. Some search engines, such as Altavista and Go, index “keywords” in metadata.

Until the problem of abuse by spammers has been solved or at least decreased, metadata recognition in commercial web indexing probably will not occur. The use of keywords in keyword fields will result in more precise results than just matching words in the text.

However, individual state and individual agency search engines can target metatags to theoretically increase search efficiency. A 1997 study found that the use of the keyword function improved rankings, but the use of “descriptive” tags did not.

### 4. Distribution of e-products

The term e-product describes developed curricular or educational material that can be accessed over the Internet and includes educational web sites, Adobe Acrobat PDF files, Flash animations, and movie files. These products might also be available in a format for physical distribution, but because of the different nature of Internet distribution, the e-product should be evaluated independently for suitability. e-products can provide quality curriculum material for the e-learning initiative that is being endorsed for No Child Left Behind.

#### Required on All Products

- **Educational product number.**
- **NASA insignia.** The NASA insignia, also called the NASA “meatball,” can be reproduced from the following NASA web site:  
<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/insignia/text/color.html/>. The web site provides recommendations for use of the logo in color and for different purposes, including electronic publication. On the Internet and for other electronic uses, there are approved versions of color images, animated forms, and frozen framed three-dimensional versions of the NASA insignia, which are all acceptable. Any new three-

dimensional versions of the NASA insignia will be reviewed by the headquarters visual identity coordinator on a case-by-case basis. Non-NASA web sites are not permitted to use the NASA insignia.

- **Product review recommendation.** If the e-product has passed the product review process, then its distribution will follow the specific recommendation for dissemination:
  1. Broad distribution
  2. Limited distribution
  3. Workshop distribution