



Compliance at NSA



How does the National Security Agency (NSA) define “compliance”?

Compliance is a broadly used term in government and industry and is generally defined as the process of meeting the expectations of others. Stated another way, it is verifiable conformance with a set of clearly defined rules. At NSA, the term “compliance” refers to activities that assure consistency with legal and policy rules that protect privacy during mission activities.

Why does NSA care so much about compliance?

Like other Intelligence Community agencies, NSA has been charged with national security missions of the utmost importance. We are expected and required to execute those missions in a reasonable and lawful manner. Every NSA employee has sworn an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Failure by NSA to carry out its missions in accordance with established law and policy could violate privacy rights and harm U.S. national security and other interests. Moreover, NSA puts its current and possible future authorities at risk should it appear incapable of successfully executing its current missions responsibly. For these reasons, mission compliance has long been a part of the NSA culture.

Who is responsible for compliance at NSA?

While performing the Agency’s missions in a compliant manner is everyone’s duty, the Director of NSA is ultimately responsible for compliance at NSA. Key senior executives have been appointed to lead and shape the compliance framework on his behalf, and over 250 personnel support the compliance program. The Compliance Group manages the overall compliance program and works with other organizations to train personnel, develop and implement technical safeguards, and set up systems to monitor and guide NSA’s activities.

All NSA personnel (civilians, military members, integrees, and contractors) are required to be familiar with and agree to uphold the laws, policies, procedures and regulations that govern NSA mission activities and implement privacy protections. NSA employees take regular training throughout their careers in order to ensure proper handling of personal information. All employees are required to take annual core Intelligence Oversight training, and some employees may require specialized training depending upon their assigned missions.

All NSA personnel are obligated to report when they reasonably believe NSA is not, or may not be, acting consistently with law, policy, or procedure.

How does NSA carry out its compliance responsibilities?

Developed from industry and government best practices, NSA’s Comprehensive Mission Compliance Program (CMCP) provides reasonable assurance that personnel, operational activities, and technology remain consistent with numerous, distinct authorizations and the Attorney General-approved procedures that govern those authorities. Compliance personnel regularly consult with the NSA Office of General Counsel to ensure processes and training

accurately reflect current laws and procedures. NSA's CMCP is comprised of the following offices:

- Compliance Controls – Manages compliance rules and data governance functions, maintains an internal controls framework, and identifies and prioritizes needs for compliance capabilities and services.
- Compliance Awareness – Provides effective compliance training and communicates the importance of compliance to the workforce.
- Compliance Monitoring & Verification – Monitors and conducts assessments to verify the effectiveness of compliance safeguards.
- Compliance for Cybersecurity and Operations – Serves as principal advisor on all matters relating to compliance and mission operations.
- Compliance for Capabilities – Serves as principal advisor on all matters relating to compliance and technology.
- Compliance for Research – Serves as principal advisor on all matters relating to compliance and research efforts.

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