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Section 508 Overview

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Background

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 508), as amended in 1998, requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible. The amendments to Section 508 in 1998 directed the United States Access Board to develop and issue EIT accessibility standards. The Access Board issued the original Section 508 Standards in a Final Rule on December 21, 2000, which went into effect on June 21, 2001. On January 18, 2017, the Access Board issued a “508 Refresh” Final Rule, updating the standards (Revised 508 Standards) for accessible information and communication technology (ICT, previously called EIT), which became effective on January 18, 2018.ⁱ The 508 Refresh incorporated by reference the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 A and AA, a set of electronic information accessibility guidelines developed by an international coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to web accessibility.ⁱⁱ

The Revised 508 Standards define ICT as:

Information technology and other equipment, systems, technologies, or processes, for which the principal function is the creation, manipulation, storage, display, receipt, or transmission of electronic data and information, as well as any associated content. Examples of ICT include, but are not limited to: computers and peripheral equipment; information kiosks and transaction machines; telecommunications equipment; customer premises equipment; multifunction office machines; software; applications; Web sites; videos; and, electronic documents.

ICT that is procured, developed, maintained, or used by agencies shall conform to the Revised 508 Standards. The Revised 508 Standards also clarify the electronic content that Federal agencies are required to make conformant with the Revised 508 Standards:

- All public-facing content.
- Nine categories of non-public facing content that communicate official agency business:
 - A. An emergency notification.
 - B. An initial or final decision adjudicating an administrative claim or proceeding.
 - C. An internal or external program or policy announcement.
 - D. A notice of benefits, program eligibility, employment opportunity, or personnel action.
 - E. A formal acknowledgement of receipt.
 - F. A survey questionnaire.
 - G. A template or form.
 - H. Educational or training materials.
 - I. Intranet content designed as a Web page.

Accessibility versus Section 508

- With respect to electronic and information technology or information and communication technology, accessibility is the ability of all persons to independently obtain information and use products, services and facilities.
- The Revised Section 508 Standards are the Federal Government’s standard for ICT accessibility, a minimum baseline.

ⁱ <https://www.section508.gov/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/about/>