



Section 508 and NASA
Presentation to GSFC Webmasters
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Topics

- Section 508 background
- NASA and the Federal Section 508 community
- NASA Section 508 team
- Section 508 requirements for Web pages
- NASA Web requirements for Section 508
- Resources



Section 508 Background

- The legal basis for Section 508 . . .
 - The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 amended Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
 - When developing, procuring, maintaining, or using Electronic and Information Technology (EIT), Federal agencies must ensure that Federal employees with disabilities have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to that for other employees
 - Members of the public with disabilities seeking information or services from an agency must have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to that for members of the public without disabilities
 - Above requirements must be met unless to do so would cause an “undue burden”



Section 508 Background

- How the law was implemented at the Federal level . . .
 - The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) published final EIT accessibility standards in the Federal Register, following extensive public comment and debate, on April 25, 2001
 - The Access Board EIT accessibility standards became effective June 25, 2001



Section 508 Background

- Technology scope of Section 508 . . .
 - From a technology point of view, Section 508 includes just about everything
 - Includes all Information Technology (IT) plus telecommunications products (e.g., telephones), information kiosks and transaction machines, **Web sites**, multimedia, and office equipment such as copiers and fax machines
 - Excludes embedded IT such as controllers for HVAC and for medical equipment



Section 508 Background

- Section 508 technical standards for specific technologies and products . . .
 - Software applications and operating systems
 - Web-based intranet and internet information and applications
 - Telecommunications products
 - Video and multimedia products
 - Self contained, closed products
 - Desktop and portable computers



Section 508 Background

- Section 508 functional performance criteria (six of these) . . .
 - Covers technologies or components for which there is no standard covered by the previous seven categories
 - E.g., technology or product does not yet exist or was not contemplated by Access Board standards
 - “(a) At least one mode of operation and information retrieval that does not require user vision shall be provided, or support for assistive technology used by people who are blind or visually impaired shall be provided”



Section 508 Background

- Section 508 information, documentation, and support requirements . . .
 - Product support documentation provided to end-users shall be made available in alternate formats upon request, at no additional charge
 - End-user shall have access to a description of the accessibility and compatibility features of products in alternate formats or alternate methods upon request, at no additional charge
 - Support services for products shall accommodate the communication needs of end-users with disabilities



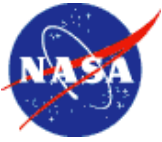
Section 508 Background

- Organizational scope of Section 508 . . .
 - Applies to all Federal departments and agencies, including the US Postal Service
 - Applies to contractors supplying products and services to Federal departments and agencies, unless the contractor's use of EIT is incidental to the product or service (statutory requirement is on the departments and agencies, not on the contractors)
 - Does not apply to the states, though some are aligning their laws with Section 508
 - Does not apply to private industry in general, e.g., www.microsoft.com and www.sun.com do not have to be Section 508 compliant



Section 508 Background

- Exceptions
 - Certain systems related to national security and national defense
 - EIT acquired by a contractor incidental to a contract
 - Making compliant would cause a “fundamental alteration” to a product
 - Products located in spaces frequented only by service personnel for maintenance, repair, or occasional monitoring of equipment



Section 508 Background

- Section 508 enforcement provisions . . .
 - Agencies may be sued if their EIT purchases do not comply with applicable Access Board standards unless an exception has been documented
 - Purchases situation applies to products and services
 - Apparent enforcement loophole related to web pages developed by civil service staff expected to be closed by upcoming Executive Order/Memorandum
 - Also, media attention and audits by Office of Inspector General, General Accounting Office, and other oversight groups impose scrutiny on and re-enforce accountability of agencies



Section 508 Background

- What about “undue burden”?
 - Concept that came out of Section 504 (requires accessibility to buildings, etc.)
 - Defined as “significant difficulty or expense”
 - For Section 508, must consider all agency resources available to the relevant program or component
 - Although case law exists for Section 504, how undue burden should be interpreted for Section 508 is unclear and controversial
 - See NASA web policy on Section 508 for more information
 - Consult with Center legal staff



Section 508 Background

- Why we should care about Section 508 . . .
 - While Section 508 **Is The Law**, it is a law whose intent makes sense and whose thoughtful implementation will benefit federal agencies, their employees, and the public
 - Federal agencies must do more with fewer resources: we need the best from all our employees, including those with disabilities
 - Support for NASA's programs requires buy-in from all segments of the American public, including citizens with disabilities



NASA and Federal Section 508 Community

- NASA is active in the Federal Section 508 community . . .
 - NASA Office of Procurement (Code H) is one of the drafters of the Federal Acquisition Regulations addressing Section 508
 - The NASA CIO is a member of the Federal Section 508 Steering Committee and the industry/government/academia Accessibility Forum
 - NASA Agency-level Section 508 Team co-chair is a member of the Federal Section 508 Working Group
 - Both NASA Agency-level Section 508 co-chairs speak at national-level Section 508 conferences



NASA Section 508 Team

- NASA established a Section 508 team to address its implementation in the Agency . . .
 - Representatives from every Center
 - Representatives from Agency-level offices: CIO, procurement, legal, EEO, human resources
 - Co-chaired by Charles Redmond and Bob Benedict (HQ)
 - Telecons every other week to share information, resolve issues, etc.



Section 508 Requirements for Web Pages

- Sixteen Section 508 Web requirements
 - Some are relatively straight-forward: “A text equivalent for every non-text element shall be provided”
 - Others are trickier and are still being interpreted: “When a web page requires that an applet, plug-in or other application be present on the client system to interpret page content, the page must provide a link to a plug-in or applet that complies with (*requirements for software applications and operating systems*)”
 - Headquarters and others (e.g., GSA) have prepared excellent training materials in this area
 - **Key**: follow the standards; do not rely solely on tools



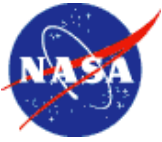
NASA Web Requirements for Section 508

- NASA CIO issued on June 19, 2001, policy for compliance of NASA web pages with Section 508
 - Provides guidance for both new and existing web pages
 - Establishes waiver process for undue burden
 - Requires Center-level plans to address bringing web pages into compliance
 - Initial plans due September 30, 2001
 - Plan updates due every six months afterwards
 - Policy was not prescriptive on plan format and level of detail
 - Submitted Center plans were generally good but varied widely in level of detail provided



NASA Web Requirements for Section 508

- New Web pages
 - Effective the date of policy, new Web pages must be compliant unless undue burden would result
 - Undue burden waivers must be approved by the Center CIO before new Web pages are posted
 - Concurrent email notification to the NASA CIO
 - New contracts that include Web work must require compliance
 - Centers should modify existing contracts, as needed, to ensure new Web pages are compliant



NASA Web Requirements for Section 508

- Existing Web pages (three priorities)
 - Priority one (most important)
 - Twenty most popular Web pages at every Center should have been made compliant by September 30, 2001, unless undue burden waiver approved by NASA CIO
 - Update top twenty list on a scheduled basis and ensure compliance
 - Priority two
 - Center Web pages that NASA employees, contractors, or the public use to enter information to request services or report a situation
 - Some purely informational pages may be more important: Centers should use their judgement



NASA Web Requirements for Section 508

- Existing Web pages (contd.)
 - Priority three
 - All Center web pages that are not Priority one or two
 - Consider making infrequently used and less important Web pages compliant as they are modified for other reasons
 - Retire pages that are no longer needed rather than expend resources to make compliant
- New and existing Web pages
 - “The Agency does not want to discourage innovative technical approaches for making information available via the Web”



Resources

- www.section508.gov
 - GSA site: general information, training, lots of relevant links (law, standards, etc.)
- www.access-board.gov/508.htm
 - Access Board developed standards. Good links
- www.ed.gov
 - Department of Education on forefront of Section 508
- www.hq.nasa.gov/office/procurement/regs/pic01-13.html
 - NASA Procurement Information Circular on Section 508



Questions

- Any questions ???