



Prescott

Prescott is a Cyber AB Registered Provider Organization (RPO), and we work with defense contractors and their IT partners across the U.S.

Learn more at prescott.us or reach out to info@prescott.us.

CMMC GUIDE

A plain-language overview

What is CMMC?

The Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) is a Department of War requirement designed to protect sensitive government information shared with contractors.

If you handle Federal Contract Information (FCI) or Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) as part of a Department of War contract, CMMC applies to you.

That includes prime contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers across the defense industrial base, between 220,000 and 300,000 companies in total.

Two Types of Information CMMC Protects

Federal Contract Information (FCI): Information provided by the government through a contract that isn't intended for public release but is necessary to complete the work.

Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI): Information that requires safeguarding but isn't classified. This includes technical data, financial details, personnel records, and other sensitive non-public information.

The type of information you handle determines which CMMC level applies to your organization.

The CMMC Levels

Level 1 — Basic safeguarding for organizations that handle FCI but not CUI.

- 15 basic security practices
- Annual self-assessment and annual affirmation
- No third-party assessment required

Level 2 — Advanced protection for organizations that handle CUI.

- 110 controls aligned with NIST SP 800-171 Revision 2
- Self-assessment or third-party assessment every three years, depending on the contract
- The level most defense contractors will need

Level 3 — Expert-level protection for organizations handling CUI tied to the most sensitive defense programs.

- Additional controls beyond Level 2
- Government-led assessment by the Defense Industrial Base Cybersecurity Assessment Center (DIBCAC)



Most defense contractors will need Level 2. Whether you also need Level 3 depends on the specific contracts you're working under.

How the Assessment Process Works

Assessment methods vary by level. Level 1 and some Level 2 organizations conduct self-assessments. Other Level 2 organizations are assessed by Certified Third-Party Assessment Organizations (C3PAOs). Level 3 assessments are conducted by the Defense Industrial Base Cybersecurity Assessment Center (DIBCAC).

Before the assessment, most organizations need to:

- Document current security practices
- Implement any missing controls
- Submit a Supplier Performance Risk System (SPRS) score
- Prepare evidence that controls are operating as required

During the assessment, the assessor reviews documentation, interviews team members, and validates that controls work in practice. They can only tell you whether each control is "met" or "not met", they can't help you fix gaps.

After certification, organizations must maintain compliance through ongoing practices, documentation updates, annual SPRS affirmations from a designated Affirming Official, and re-assessment every three years for Level 2 and Level 3.

Timeline Expectations

CMMC preparation typically takes:

- 6-12 months for organizations with some security measures already in place
- 12-18 months or more for organizations starting from scratch

The timeline depends on current security maturity, documentation status, team capacity, and the level being pursued.

The CMMC Rollout

CMMC is being implemented through a four-phase plan over three years, with Phase 1 active from November 10, 2025 through November 9, 2026. Phase 1 focuses on Level 1 and Level 2 self-assessments appearing in applicable Department of War solicitations.

Some Phase 1 contracts may also require Level 2 C3PAO certification at the Department of War's discretion. Prime contractors are flowing requirements down to subcontractors now, often ahead of formal phase deadlines.

Waiting for the requirement to become mandatory is not a sustainable strategy. Most organizations need 6-18 months to prepare, and prime contractors are increasingly selecting subcontractors based on certification status today.

Official CMMC Documentation

For the source materials, assessment guides, and ongoing program updates, visit the [DoW CIO's CMMC Resources & Documentation page](#).