

miscertification. In addition to any other remedy available, and pursuant to the requirements of Subpart 32.6, the Government may collect this debt by offsetting the amount against any payment due the awardee under any contract between the awardee and the Government.

(i) When a protest is sustained by GAO under circumstances that may allow the Government to seek reimbursement for protest costs, the contracting officer will determine whether the protest was sustained based on the awardee's negligent or intentional misrepresentation. If the protest was sustained on several issues, protest costs shall be apportioned according to the costs attributable to the awardee's actions.

(ii) The contracting officer shall review the amount of the debt, degree of the awardee's fault, and costs of collection, to determine whether a demand for reimbursement ought to be made. If it is in the best interests of the Government to seek reimbursement, the contracting officer shall notify the contractor in writing of the nature and amount of the debt, and the intention to collect by offset if necessary. Prior to issuing a final decision, the contracting officer shall afford the contractor an opportunity to inspect and copy agency records pertaining to the debt to the extent permitted by statute and regulation, and to request review of the matter by the head of the contracting activity.

(iii) When appropriate, the contracting officer shall also refer the matter to the agency debarment official for consideration under Subpart 9.4.

(c) In accordance with 31 U.S.C. 1558, with respect to any protest filed with the GAO, if the funds available to the agency for a contract at the time a protest is filed in connection with a solicitation for, proposed award of, or award of such a contract would otherwise expire, such funds shall remain available for obligation for 100 days after the date on which the final ruling is made on the protest. A ruling is considered final on the date on which the time allowed for filing an appeal or request for reconsideration has expired, or the date on which a decision is ren-

dered on such appeal or request, whichever is later.

(d) *Protest likely after award.* The contracting officer may stay performance of a contract within the time period contained in 33.104(c)(1) if the contracting officer makes a written determination that—

(1) A protest is likely to be filed; and

(2) Delay of performance is, under the circumstances, in the best interests of the United States.

(e) An interested party wishing to protest is encouraged to seek resolution within the agency (see 33.103) before filing a protest with the GAO, but may protest to the GAO in accordance with GAO regulations (4 CFR part 21).

(f) No person may file a protest at GAO for a procurement integrity violation unless that person reported to the contracting officer the information constituting evidence of the violation within 14 days after the person first discovered the possible violation (41 U.S.C. 423(g)).

[50 FR 2270, Jan. 15, 1985, as amended at 55 FR 38517, Sept. 18, 1990; 55 FR 52795, Dec. 21, 1990; 60 FR 48226, 48275, Sept. 18, 1995; 61 FR 41470, Aug. 8, 1996; 61 FR 67411, Dec. 20, 1996; 62 FR 233, Jan. 2, 1997; 63 FR 35724, June 30, 1998]

33.103 Protests to the agency.

(a) *Reference.* Executive Order 12979, Agency Procurement Protests, establishes policy on agency procurement protests.

(b) Prior to submission of an agency protest, all parties shall use their best efforts to resolve concerns raised by an interested party at the contracting officer level through open and frank discussions.

(c) The agency should provide for inexpensive, informal, procedurally simple, and expeditious resolution of protests. Where appropriate, the use of alternative dispute resolution techniques, third party neutrals, and another agency's personnel are acceptable protest resolution methods.

(d) The following procedures are established to resolve agency protests effectively, to build confidence in the Government's acquisition system, and to reduce protests outside of the agency:

(1) Protests shall be concise and logically presented to facilitate review by the agency. Failure to substantially comply with any of the requirements of paragraph (d)(2) of this section may be grounds for dismissal of the protest.

(2) Protests shall include the following information:

(i) Name, address, and fax and telephone numbers of the protester.

(ii) Solicitation or contract number.

(iii) Detailed statement of the legal and factual grounds for the protest, to include a description of resulting prejudice to the protester.

(iv) Copies of relevant documents.

(v) Request for a ruling by the agency.

(vi) Statement as to the form of relief requested.

(vii) All information establishing that the protester is an interested party for the purpose of filing a protest.

(viii) All information establishing the timeliness of the protest.

(3) All protests filed directly with the agency will be addressed to the contracting officer or other official designated to receive protests.

(4) In accordance with agency procedures, interested parties may request an independent review of their protest at a level above the contracting officer; solicitations should advise potential bidders and offerors that this review is available. Agency procedures and/or solicitations shall notify potential bidders and offerors whether this independent review is available as an alternative to consideration by the contracting officer of a protest or is available as an appeal of a contracting officer decision on a protest. Agencies shall designate the official(s) who are to conduct this independent review, but the official(s) need not be within the contracting officer's supervisory chain. When practicable, officials designated to conduct the independent review should not have had previous personal involvement in the procurement. If there is an agency appellate review of the contracting officer's decision on the protest, it will not extend GAO's timeliness requirements. Therefore, any subsequent protest to the GAO must be filed within 10 days of knowl-

edge of initial adverse agency action (4 CFR 21.2(a)(3)).

(e) Protests based on alleged apparent improprieties in a solicitation shall be filed before bid opening or the closing date for receipt of proposals. In all other cases, protests shall be filed no later than 10 days after the basis of protest is known or should have been known, whichever is earlier. The agency, for good cause shown, or where it determines that a protest raises issues significant to the agency's acquisition system, may consider the merits of any protest which is not timely filed.

(f) *Action upon receipt of protest.* (1) Upon receipt of a protest before award, a contract may not be awarded, pending agency resolution of the protest, unless contract award is justified, in writing, for urgent and compelling reasons or is determined, in writing, to be in the best interest of the Government. Such justification or determination shall be approved at a level above the contracting officer, or by another official pursuant to agency procedures.

(2) If award is withheld pending agency resolution of the protest, the contracting officer will inform the offerors whose offers might become eligible for award of the contract. If appropriate, the offerors should be requested, before expiration of the time for acceptance of their offers, to extend the time for acceptance to avoid the need for resolicitation. In the event of failure to obtain such extension of offers, consideration should be given to proceeding with award pursuant to paragraph (f)(1) of this section.

(3) Upon receipt of a protest within 10 days after contract award or within 5 days after a debriefing date offered to the protester under a timely debriefing request in accordance with 15.505 or 15.506, whichever is later, the contracting officer shall immediately suspend performance, pending resolution of the protest within the agency, including any review by an independent higher level official, unless continued performance is justified, in writing, for urgent and compelling reasons or is determined, in writing, to be in the best interest of the Government. Such justification or determination shall be approved at a level above the contracting

officer, or by another official pursuant to agency procedures.

(4) Pursuing an agency protest does not extend the time for obtaining a stay at GAO. Agencies may include, as part of the agency protest process, a voluntary suspension period when agency protests are denied and the protester subsequently files at GAO.

(g) Agencies shall make their best efforts to resolve agency protests within 35 days after the protest is filed. To the extent permitted by law and regulation, the parties may exchange relevant information.

(h) Agency protest decisions shall be well-reasoned, and explain the agency position. The protest decision shall be provided to the protester using a method that provides evidence of receipt.

[61 FR 39219, July 29, 1996, as amended at 61 FR 69289, Dec. 31, 1996; 62 FR 270, Jan. 2, 1997; 62 FR 10710, Mar. 10, 1997; 62 FR 51271, Sept. 30, 1997]

33.104 Protests to GAO.

Procedures for protests to GAO are found at 4 CFR Part 21 (GAO Bid Protest Regulations). In the event guidance concerning GAO procedure in this section conflicts with 4 CFR Part 21, 4 CFR Part 21 governs.

(a) *General procedures.* (1) A protester is required to furnish a copy of its complete protest to the official and location designated in the solicitation or, in the absence of such a designation, to the contracting officer, so it is received no later than 1 day after the protest is filed with the GAO. The GAO may dismiss the protest if the protester fails to furnish a complete copy of the protest within 1 day.

(2) Immediately after receipt of the GAO's written notice that a protest has been filed, the agency shall give notice of the protest to the contractor if the award has been made, or, if no award has been made, to all parties who appear to have a reasonable prospect of receiving award if the protest is denied. The agency shall furnish copies of the protest submissions to such parties with instructions to (i) communicate directly with the GAO, and (ii) provide copies of any such communication to the agency and to other participating parties when they become known. However, if the protester has identified sen-

sitive information and requests a protective order, then the contracting officer shall obtain a redacted version from the protester to furnish to other interested parties, if one has not already been provided.

(3)(i) Upon notice that a protest has been filed with the GAO, the contracting officer shall immediately begin compiling the information necessary for a report to the GAO. The agency shall submit a complete report to the GAO within 30 days after the GAO notifies the agency by telephone that a protest has been filed, or within 20 days after receipt from the GAO of a determination to use the express option, unless the GAO—

(A) Advises the agency that the protest has been dismissed; or

(B) Authorizes a longer period in response to an agency's request for an extension. Any new date is documented in the agency's file.

(ii) When a protest is filed with the GAO, and an actual or prospective offeror so requests, the procuring agency shall, in accordance with any applicable protective orders, provide actual or prospective offerors reasonable access to the protest file. However, if the GAO dismisses the protest before the documents are submitted to the GAO, then no protest file need be made available. Information exempt from disclosure under 5 U.S.C. 552 may be redacted from the protest file. The protest file shall be made available to non-intervening actual or prospective offerors within a reasonable time after submittal of an agency report to the GAO. The protest file shall include an index and as appropriate—

(A) The protest;

(B) The offer submitted by the protester;

(C) The offer being considered for award or being protested;

(D) All relevant evaluation documents;

(E) The solicitation, including the specifications or portions relevant to the protest;

(F) The abstract of offers or relevant portions; and

(G) Any other documents that the agency determines are relevant to the protest, including documents specifically requested by the protester.