

CMMC Acronym Cheat Sheet for Manufacturers

CMMC is no longer something manufacturers can afford to ignore.

If you're doing work in the defense supply chain—or even thinking about it—this is quickly becoming a requirement, not a “nice to have.” But the hardest part isn't just compliance... it's understanding the language.

This cheat sheet breaks down the key acronyms so you can quickly understand what matters—and why.

Core CMMC Framework

- **CMMC (Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification):** The Department of Defense framework that defines how contractors must protect sensitive data.
- **CUI (Controlled Unclassified Information):** Sensitive government data that isn't classified—but still must be protected.
- **NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology):** The organization that created the cybersecurity standards behind CMMC.
- **[NIST 800-171](#):** The specific set of security controls required to protect CUI.

Compliance & Certification Players

- **RPO (Registered Practitioner Organization):** Organizations that guide you through CMMC readiness.
- **C3PAO (Certified Third-Party Assessment Organization):** The official auditors who assess and certify compliance.

Processes & Documentation

- **POAM (Plan of Action and Milestones):** A document outlining compliance gaps and how you plan to fix them.
- **SSP (System Security Plan):** Documentation of how your systems meet required security controls.

Systems & Infrastructure

- **FedRAMP (Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program):** A certification for cloud providers used by the federal government.

- **Shared Responsibility Matrix:** Defines who is responsible for security across vendors and your business.

Ecosystem & Key Roles

- **ATO (Authority to Operate):** Formal approval that a system is authorized to process sensitive government data. If your system doesn't have this (or equivalent via FedRAMP), you may not be compliant.
- **MSSP (Managed Security Service Provider):** A third-party company that manages your cybersecurity (monitoring, threat detection, etc.). Many manufacturers will rely on an MSSP instead of building this internally.
- **Cloud Service Provider (CSP):** A company that provides cloud-based systems (ERP, storage, etc.). If they touch CUI, they likely need to meet FedRAMP requirements.
- **OSC (Organization Seeking Certification):** Your company. This is the official term for a business going through CMMC certification.

Key Takeaway

CMMC isn't just an IT project. It touches your systems, your shop floor, your vendors, and your ability to win future work.