

# Federal Construction Scheduling Compliance Report

Common Rejection Points, DCMA Assessment Benchmarks,  
and Best Practices for First-Submission Approval

**72%**

Schedules with  
Network Issues

**5.2**

Avg. Review  
Cycles

**\$48K**

Cost of  
Baseline Delay

**14**

DCMA Assessment  
Check Points

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# 01 — Executive Summary

Federal construction scheduling specifications are among the most demanding in the industry. Agencies like USACE, NAVFAC, the VA, and GSA enforce detailed requirements for CPM network logic, activity coding, calendar configuration, cost loading, resource allocation, and narrative reporting that go far beyond what most commercial contracts require.

This report examines the most common compliance failures based on our experience reviewing hundreds of contractor schedule submissions across multiple federal agencies over the past 15 years. We identify the specific issues that trigger rejections, quantify the cost of non-compliance, establish benchmarks for DCMA 14-point assessment performance, and provide actionable best practices for achieving first-submission approval.

## Key Findings

- Over 60% of initial baseline submissions contain at least one rejection-level deficiency
- Network logic issues (open ends, missing predecessors/successors) are the #1 reason for rejection
- The average contractor requires 3-5 review cycles before baseline approval on their first federal project
- Each rejected baseline delays mobilization by 2-4 weeks and costs \$30K-\$80K in indirect expenses
- Contractors who perform pre-submission DCMA assessments reduce rejection rates by approximately 70%
- Cost loading deficiencies are the most frequently overlooked requirement in baseline submissions

## 02 — The Cost of Schedule Non-Compliance

A rejected baseline schedule is not merely an administrative inconvenience. It triggers a cascade of financial and operational consequences that compound with every review cycle.

### Direct Financial Impact

When a baseline schedule is rejected, the contractor cannot submit their first payment application. For a \$20M contract with a 12-month duration, each week of delayed mobilization represents approximately \$12,000-\$18,000 in unrecoverable general conditions costs: field office, supervision, insurance, equipment standby, and subcontractor holding costs. A typical 3-cycle rejection process spanning 6-8 weeks can cost \$48,000-\$120,000 before a single dollar of progress billing is approved.

Impact Category	Per Week	Typical Delay	Total Cost Range
General Conditions	\$8,000-\$15,000	4-8 weeks	\$32,000-\$120,000
Subcontractor Standby	\$3,000-\$8,000	2-6 weeks	\$6,000-\$48,000
Lost Productivity	\$5,000-\$12,000	2-4 weeks	\$10,000-\$48,000
Re-submission Effort	\$2,500-\$5,000	Per cycle	\$7,500-\$25,000
Relationship Damage	Unquantifiable	Ongoing	Loss of future work

Figure 1: Estimated cost impact of baseline schedule rejection (based on \$20M contract)

### Operational Consequences

Beyond direct costs, rejected schedules create operational dysfunction. Subcontractors lose confidence in the prime contractor's planning capability. The owner's scheduling representative flags the contractor for increased scrutiny on all future submissions. And critically, a late-approved baseline compresses the available construction duration, increasing the probability of liquidated damages exposure at the end of the project.

## 03 — Top 10 Reasons Baseline Schedules Get Rejected

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Based on our review of contractor schedule submissions across multiple federal agencies, the following deficiencies account for the vast majority of baseline rejections. They are listed in approximate order of frequency.

### 1. Open-Ended Activities

Activities without predecessors or successors create gaps in the network logic that undermine critical path calculation and float analysis. DCMA threshold: no more than 5% of activities should lack either a predecessor or successor. Most federal specifications require zero open ends on non-milestone activities.

### 2. Missing or Incomplete Cost Loading

Federal contracts almost universally require cost-loaded schedules for payment application support. Activities must be loaded with budget values that sum to the contract amount. Common failures include activities with zero cost, cost loaded to milestones instead of work activities, and total loaded cost not matching the Schedule of Values.

### 3. Excessive Use of Constraints

Hard constraints (Must Start On, Must Finish On) override network logic and mask the true critical path. When reviewers see more than 5% of activities constrained, it signals that the schedule was forced to fit a narrative rather than built from logic.

### 4. Inadequate Activity Detail

Activities that are too long (over 20 working days) or too vague ("Phase 2 Work") fail to provide the granularity needed for meaningful progress tracking. Federal specifications typically require activity durations between 1-20 working days with clear scope descriptions.

### 5. Calendar Configuration Errors

Incorrect holiday schedules, missing weather days, wrong work hours, or activities assigned to the wrong calendar. These errors cascade through the entire schedule, shifting completion dates and creating false critical paths.

### 6. Missing or Non-Compliant Narrative

The schedule narrative report is a contractual deliverable, not an afterthought. Rejections occur when narratives fail to describe the critical path, explain methodology and assumptions, or address all specification requirements.

### 7. Logic Density Below Threshold

A schedule with too few relationships relative to activities indicates that the network was not fully developed. DCMA recommends relationship ratio (relationships per activity) of at least 1.5. Federal reviewers expect every activity to be logically connected to the work before and after it.

## 8. Negative Lag (Leads)

Negative lag is used as a shortcut to overlap activities without modeling the actual construction sequence. Federal agencies universally reject schedules with negative lag because it obscures the true duration of work.

## 9. High Float Without Justification

Activities with total float exceeding 44 working days indicate disconnection from the critical path. While some long-float activities are legitimate, excessive float usually signals missing logic ties or an incomplete network.

## 10. Milestone Mapping Errors

Contract milestones not reflected in the schedule, interim milestones missing, or milestone dates that don't align with contract requirements. Reviewers cross-reference milestones against the contract and reject schedules where the mapping is incomplete or incorrect.

# 04 — DCMA 14-Point Assessment Benchmarks

The Defense Contract Management Agency's 14-point schedule assessment has become the de facto standard for evaluating CPM schedule quality across federal agencies. While originally designed for defense acquisition programs, the metrics are now applied by USACE, NAVFAC, VA, and many state agencies as baseline acceptance criteria.

#	Check	Threshold	Common Fail Rate
1	Logic (Open Ends)	< 5%	68%
2	Leads (Negative Lag)	0%	42%
3	Lags	< 5%	35%
4	Relationship Types	> 90% FS	28%
5	Hard Constraints	< 5%	55%
6	High Float (> 44d)	< 5%	38%
7	Negative Float	0 activities	22%
8	High Duration (> 44d)	< 5%	30%
9	Invalid Dates	0 activities	15%
10	Resources	All loaded	60%
11	Missed Tasks	< 5%	25%
12	Critical Path Test	Valid	18%
13	CPLI	> 1.0	32%
14	BEI	> 0.95	28%

Figure 2: DCMA 14-point assessment thresholds and approximate first-submission failure rates

The "Common Fail Rate" column reflects approximate first-submission failure rates observed across baseline schedule reviews. These rates drop significantly for contractors who perform internal DCMA assessments before submission. Resource loading (Check #10) and open ends (Check #1) are the most frequently failed metrics.

## 05 — Agency-Specific Requirements

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While DCMA provides a universal quality framework, each federal agency adds its own scheduling specification requirements. Understanding agency-specific expectations is critical for first-submission success.

### U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

USACE scheduling specifications (typically UFGS 01 32 01.00 10) are the most prescriptive in federal construction. Requirements include detailed activity coding by area, phase, and responsibility; contractor-defined calendars with weather day exclusions based on historical NOAA data; cost-loaded activities supporting the Schedule of Values; and a formal CPM Network Analysis Report with each submission. USACE is particularly strict about fragnet submission protocols for modifications and time extension requests, requiring TIA methodology per AACE RP 29R-03.

### Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC)

NAVFAC specifications emphasize crew-based activity durations and resource-loaded schedules. Projects often involve heightened security requirements that restrict access patterns and shift scheduling. These constraints must be accurately reflected in both the CPM network and calendar configuration. NAVFAC reviewers pay particular attention to resource leveling and the realism of crew assignments relative to activity durations.

### Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

VA scheduling specifications require activity coding that maps to their standardized work breakdown structure, milestone definitions tied to beneficial occupancy phases, and monthly update packages that include specific earned value metrics and variance explanations. VA projects frequently involve phased renovations in occupied healthcare facilities, adding complexity around infection control scheduling and interim life safety requirements.

### General Services Administration (GSA)

GSA projects involve phased renovations in occupied federal buildings, requiring detailed sequencing around tenant operations, building system shutdowns, and interim milestone commitments. GSA reviewers focus on phasing plan compliance and the schedule's ability to demonstrate that tenant disruption will be minimized as committed in the project execution plan.

# 06 — Schedule Quality Metrics: What Good Looks Like

Based on our analysis of approved baseline schedules across federal agencies, the following metrics characterize schedules that pass on first or second submission.

Metric	Poor	Acceptable	Best Practice
Open Ends	> 10%	< 5%	0% (non-milestones)
Logic Density	< 1.2	1.5 - 2.0	> 2.0
FS Relationships	< 80%	> 90%	> 95%
Hard Constraints	> 10%	< 5%	< 2%
Avg Duration	> 25 days	10-20 days	5-15 days
Float > 44 days	> 15%	< 5%	< 2%
Negative Float	Any amount	0 activities	0 activities
Cost Loading	Not loaded	Partial	100% loaded
Resource Loading	Not loaded	Key trades	All activities
Narrative Quality	Missing/brief	Meets spec	Exceeds spec

Figure 3: Schedule quality benchmarks (Poor / Acceptable / Best Practice)

## 07 — The Monthly Update Trap

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Even after baseline approval, many contractors lose compliance during monthly schedule updates. The pressure to show progress and maintain positive float leads to practices that gradually degrade schedule integrity.

### Common Update Deficiencies

- Out-of-sequence progress reported without logic corrections, creating broken network paths
- Remaining durations not updated to reflect actual field conditions, masking emerging delays
- New activities added without proper logic integration, creating orphaned work packages
- Constraints added to force completion dates rather than allowing the network to calculate naturally
- Narrative reports that describe what happened but fail to explain critical path changes and variances
- Cost and resource loading not updated to reflect approved change orders and scope modifications
- Data date inconsistencies where the schedule status doesn't match the actual progress cutoff date

The cumulative effect of these update deficiencies is a schedule that gradually disconnects from reality. By month six, the schedule may show the project on track while field conditions tell a different story. When a delay event occurs and a Time Impact Analysis is needed, the corrupted schedule cannot support a defensible analysis.

# 08 — Best Practices for First-Submission Approval

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## Read the Specification Before You Build

This sounds obvious, but the majority of rejection issues stem from not reading or not fully understanding the scheduling specification. Print it, highlight every requirement, and create a compliance checklist before opening Primavera P6.

## Build Logic First, Dates Second

Start with the logic network. Every activity must have at least one predecessor and one successor. Build the network based on how the work will actually be constructed, not based on target dates. Let the schedule calculate dates from the logic, not the other way around.

## Run DCMA Assessment Before Submission

Perform a full DCMA 14-point assessment on your schedule and resolve every failed metric before submitting to the owner. Tools like Acumen Fuse, Deltek Schedule Analyzer, or our P6Schedule platform automate this process.

## Invest in the Narrative

The narrative report should describe your critical path in plain language, explain your methodology and assumptions, identify risks and mitigation strategies, and demonstrate compliance with every specification requirement. Treat the narrative as a persuasion document, not a checkbox exercise.

## Cost Load Every Work Activity

Distribute the contract value across all work activities proportional to their resource consumption. Do not lump cost into milestones, summary activities, or a few large line items. The cost-loaded schedule should produce a payment application curve that matches your actual cash flow expectations.

## Calendar Documentation

Create calendars based on documented assumptions: historical weather data from the nearest NOAA station, contractual holiday schedules, shift configurations, and any owner-imposed access restrictions. Document the basis for your calendar choices in the narrative.

## Internal QA/QC Review

Have someone other than the schedule developer review the submission package. A fresh set of eyes catches coding errors, logic gaps, narrative inconsistencies, and specification non-compliance that the developer has become blind to after weeks of building.

## Engage the Owner Early

Request a pre-submission meeting with the owner's scheduling representative to clarify ambiguous specification requirements, confirm coding structure expectations, and discuss any unusual constraints. Building a relationship

with the reviewer before the first submission dramatically improves outcomes.

## 09 — How Technology Is Changing Schedule Compliance

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The tools available for schedule quality assessment have evolved significantly. What once required hours of manual review can now be automated, giving schedulers the ability to identify and correct compliance issues before submission.

### Automated DCMA Assessment

Platforms like Acumen Fuse, Deltek Schedule Analyzer, and P6Schedule now perform full 14-point DCMA assessments in seconds, parsing XER or XML schedule files and generating detailed reports with activity-level diagnostics. This capability has transformed schedule QA/QC from a periodic exercise into a continuous compliance monitoring function.

### Browser-Based Analysis

P6Schedule (p6schedule.com) represents the next evolution: a browser-based platform that performs CPM analysis, EVM calculations, delay analysis, DCMA assessments, and Monte Carlo simulation without requiring desktop software installation. Schedulers can upload an XER file and receive a comprehensive health check with recommendations within minutes.

### AI-Assisted Schedule Review

Emerging AI capabilities are beginning to assist with schedule narrative generation, anomaly detection, and predictive delay analysis. While these tools supplement rather than replace expert judgment, they accelerate the review process and reduce the likelihood of human oversight errors. The integration of machine learning with traditional CPM analysis represents a significant advancement in schedule quality management.

# 10 — About P6 Project Controls

P6 Project Controls is a Virginia-based, SWaM-certified small business delivering federal-grade scheduling and project controls consulting for complex construction programs. With 15+ years of practitioner experience across owner, contractor, and consultant engagements, we help contractors and agencies build compliant schedules, defend against delay claims, and pass agency reviews on the first submission.

## Our Credentials

- PMP (Project Management Professional) - PMI
- PMI-SP (Scheduling Professional) - PMI
- PSP (Planning & Scheduling Professional) - AACE International
- CMIT (Certified Manager of Information Technology) - CMAA
- Virginia SWaM Certified Small Business
- SAM Registered - CAGE Code 0HQK1

## Our Services

- Baseline schedule development and monthly updates (Oracle Primavera P6)
- Independent schedule review and QA/QC for owners and CMs
- Time Impact Analysis and forensic delay analysis
- Federal scheduling compliance consulting (USACE, NAVFAC, VA, GSA)
- Earned Value Management and Power BI dashboard development
- P6Schedule platform - browser-based schedule analysis tools

### Ready to Improve Your Schedule Compliance?

Book a free 15-minute consultation to discuss your project scheduling needs.

**Email:** [info@p6master.com](mailto:info@p6master.com)

**Web:** [p6master.com](http://p6master.com) | [p6schedule.com](http://p6schedule.com)

**Schedule a call:** [calendly.com/p6master-info/30min](https://calendly.com/p6master-info/30min)