shall promptly send a written confirmation to the contracting agency and an acknowledgment to the protester. The contracting agency shall immediately give notice of the protest to the contractor if award has been made or, if no award has been made, to all bidders or offerors who appear to have a reasonable prospect of receiving an award. The contracting agency shall furnish copies of the protest submissions to those parties, except where disclosure of the information is prohibited by law, with instructions to communicate further directly with GAO. All parties shall furnish copies of all protest communications to the contracting agency and to other participating parties. All protest communications shall be sent by means reasonably calculated to effect timely delivery.

(b) A contracting agency or intervenor which believes that the protest or specific protest allegations should be dismissed before submission of an agency report should file a request for dismissal as soon as practicable.

(c) The contracting agency shall file a report on the protest with GAO within 35 days after the telephone notice of the protest from GAO. The report shall include the contracting officer's statement of the relevant facts, a memorandum of law, and an index and a copy of all relevant documents including, as appropriate: The protest; the bid or proposal submitted by the protester; the bid or proposal of the firm which is being considered for award, or whose bid or proposal is being protested; all evaluation documents; the solicitation, including the specifications or portions relevant to the protest; the abstract of bids or offers or relevant portions; and any other relevant documents. The contracting agency shall provide any additional documents requested in the protest or explain why it is not required to produce the documents. In appropriate cases, the contracting agency may request that the protester produce relevant documents that are not in the agency's possession.

(d) Subject to any protective order issued in the protest pursuant to § 21.4, the contracting agency shall simultaneously furnish a copy of the report to the protester and any intervenors. The copy of the report filed with GAO shall list the parties who have been furnished copies of the report and shall identify in an index any documents, or portions of documents, withheld from any party and the reason for the withholding. Where a protester does not have counsel admitted to a protective order and documents are withheld from the protester in

accordance with this part, the agency shall provide documents adequate to inform the protester of the basis of the agency's position.

(e) The contracting agency may request an extension of time for the submission of the agency report. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-

case basis.

(f) The protester may request additional documents when their existence or relevance first becomes evident. Except when authorized by GAO, any request for additional documents must be filed with GAO and the contracting agency not later than 2 days after their existence or relevance is known or should have been known, whichever is earlier. The contracting agency shall provide the requested documents and an index to GAO and the other parties within 5 days or explain why it is not required to produce the documents.

(g) Upon the request of a party, GAO will decide whether the contracting agency must provide any withheld documents and whether this should be done under a protective order. When withheld documents are provided, the protester's comments on the agency report shall be filed within 10 days after its receipt of the documents, unless otherwise specified by GAO.

(h) Comments on the agency report shall be filed with GAO within 14 days after receipt of the report, with a copy provided to the contracting agency and other participating parties. The protest shall be dismissed unless the protester files comments or a written statement requesting that the case be decided on the existing record, or requests an extension of time within the 14-day period. Unless otherwise advised by the protester, GAO will assume the protester received the agency report by the due date specified in the acknowledgment of protest furnished by GAO. Upon a showing that the specific circumstances of a protest require a period longer than 14 days for the submission of comments, GAO will set a new date for the submission of comments. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

(i) GAO may permit or request the submission of additional statements by the parties and by other parties not participating in the protest as may be necessary for the fair resolution of the protest.

## § 21.4 Protective orders.

(a) At the request of a party or on its own initiative, GAO may issue a protective order controlling the treatment of protected information. Such information may include

proprietary, confidential, or sourceselection-sensitive material, as well as other information the release of which could result in a competitive advantage to one or more firms. The protective order shall establish procedures for application for access to protected information, identification and safeguarding of that information, and submission of redacted copies of documents omitting protected information. Because a protective order serves to facilitate the pursuit of a protest by a protester through counsel, it is, in the first instance, the responsibility of protester's counsel to request that a protective order be issued and to submit timely applications for admission under that order.

(b) If no protective order has been issued, the agency may withhold from the parties those portions of its report which would ordinarily be subject to a protective order. GAO will review in camera all information not released to

the parties

(c) After a protective order has been issued, counsel or consultants retained by counsel appearing on behalf of a party may apply for admission under the order by submitting an application to GAO, with copies furnished simultaneously to all parties. The application shall establish that the applicant is not involved in competitive decisionmaking for any firm that could gain a competitive advantage from access to the protected information and that there will be no significant risk of inadvertent disclosure of protected information. Objections to an applicant's admission shall be raised within 2 days after receipt of the application, although GAO may consider objections raised after that

(d) Any violation of the terms of a protective order may result in the imposition of sanctions as GAO deems appropriate, including referral to appropriate bar associations or other disciplinary bodies and restricting the individual's practice before GAO.

## § 21.5 Protest issues not for consideration.

GAO shall summarily dismiss a protest or specific protest allegations that do not state a valid basis for protest, are untimely (unless considered pursuant to § 21.2(c)), or are not properly before GAO. A protest or specific protest allegations may be dismissed any time sufficient information is obtained by GAO warranting dismissal. Where an entire protest is dismissed, no agency report shall be filed; where specific protest allegations are dismissed, an agency