

INTRODUCTION

Why Electronic Case Files?

Judges and court staff now have electronic access to docket information, case management data and legal research materials; however, most documents in a case file remain available only in paper form. If it is reasonable to assume that with computer word processing, most documents generated are created first in electronic form, the federal courts can further reduce the reliance on paper records by establishing electronic case file systems. These systems should enhance the accuracy, management and security of records, reduce delays in the flow of information and achieve cost savings for the judiciary, the bar and litigants.

Potential benefits of the system include:

- improved judge, court staff, and public access to case file information
- cost savings and efficiencies through increased productivity
- reduced physical handling, maintenance, and copying of file documents
- improved docketing, scheduling, case management and statistical reporting
- enhanced accuracy and efficiency in record maintenance
- multiple parties can view the same case files simultaneously
- filing and access to court records are available virtually around the clock

This manual provides instructions on how to use the Electronic Case Filing System (ECF) to file documents with the court, or to view and retrieve docket sheets and documents for all cases assigned to this system. It assumes a working knowledge of Netscape and Adobe Acrobat. For questions regarding Netscape or Adobe Acrobat, please refer to their instruction manuals.

Help Desk

If you are in need of technical assistance, please telephone the *ECF Help Desk* at the following number: **1-888-271-8610**

[NOTE: The Help Desk is located in the Richmond Division. When leaving a message on the *ECF Help Desk* line, please include your area code. This will aid in the timely return of your call.]

Capabilities of the System

- Electronically file pleadings and documents to "live" cases.
- View official docket sheets and documents associated with cases.
- View various reports (*e.g.* Cases Filed Report, Judge's Calendar) for electronically filed cases.
- Make electronic documents easily printable for users who require a paper copy.
- Train users on a training system comparable to the "live" (official) system.
- Download the most recent version of the User's Manual.
- Download Netscape Browser and Portable Document Format ("PDF") configuration information.
- Submit comments and questions regarding the system.

REQUIREMENTS

Software

- Adobe Acrobat software 4.0 or later (Acrobat Reader and Acrobat Writer) to convert documents from word processor format to PDF (Portable Document Files)
- Netscape Navigator software, version 4.6x or 4.7x. Do NOT use Netscape version 6.0. Upgrades can be downloaded free of charge from the Netscape website @ www.netscape.com)
- An Internet Service Provider (ISP), using point-to-point protocol (PPP). Minimum connection speed of 56kps. DSL or Cable Modem preferred. America On Line is not endorsed for use with ECF
- Antivirus Protection Software. It is recommended that the virus-protection software have a “Live Update” feature that will automatically download new virus definitions when it detects they’re available.

[**NOTE:** Connection can be made at speeds less than the recommended 56kps, however, system performance may be less than optimal (*i.e.* slow response time and access)]

Due to security, a session can only be established using Netscape Navigator 4.6x or 4.7x. Many problems have been reported by users trying to access ECF using Microsoft’s Internet Explorer. The Administrative Office does not support ECF for users accessing the program via Internet Explorer.