



United States District Court District of South Carolina

Electronic Case Filing (ECF) - Frequently Asked Questions Technical Questions

How does electronic filing work?

To file electronically, attorneys create documents on their computers just as they normally do. However, instead of printing documents on paper, attorneys save them in portable document file (PDF) format. This allows documents to be read by others with formatting intact, regardless of the type of computer or word processor used. Attorneys then access the electronic filing system through the Internet. An assigned user login and password along with the attorney's s/ typed name serves as the attorney's signature for electronically filed documents. Once connected, the attorney indicates:

- ▶ the case number associated with their document,
- ▶ the party on whose behalf the document is being filed,
- ▶ the type of document (answer, motion, etc.) being filed.

The document is then uploaded to the Court's server which immediately displays a receipt on the attorney's computer verifying that the document has been received. Do not navigate elsewhere until the receipt is displayed. The receipt can be printed or saved for future reference. The system automatically creates a docket entry and makes both the updated docket sheet as well as the document itself instantly available to anyone with Internet access. The system also sends e-mail notification (NEF) of the filing to all the parties registered to receive electronic notice of the filing.

Will attorneys be able to access the CM/ECF system after the Court's regular business hours to file cases and review documents/docket sheets?

The system is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week except for periodic maintenance which is posted on the Court's home page several days in advance. Registered attorneys are also notified by email of scheduled maintenance.

How do I get started?

To file electronically, an attorney must be admitted to practice, have a PACER account, and be registered in ECF. ECF training is required. It is suggested that the attorney and other support staff filing for the attorney complete training. The ECF Registration Form is available on the Court's website at www.scd.uscourts.gov

What is the difference between ECF and PACER logins?

ECF (Electronic Case Filing) is the Court's local application used for filing new cases and documents in existing cases. Access is maintained by the district in which privileges were granted. ECF access is granted to individual attorneys and not to law firms.

PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) is an electronic public access service that allows users to obtain case and docket information from federal district, bankruptcy, and appellate courts. PACER maintains user logins and passwords.

What if I've misplaced my ECF login and password?

A current filer with a *linked* PACER account must reset passwords through PACER. You may contact PACER at www.pacer.uscourts.gov or 1-800-676-6856.

How do I update my primary and/or secondary email addresses?

For PACER accounts and accounts linked to NextGen CM/ECF:

To update your Primary Email Address:

Go to www.pacer.uscourts.gov Select the My Account & Billing menu option. Then select Manage My Account Login. Enter you PACER username and password. Once logged in, select the Maintenance Tab to Update E-Filer Email Noticing and Frequency.

For PACER and ECF accounts that are NOT linked:

To update your Primary Email Address:

- Complete the Attorney Name and Address update form for attorneys that do not have a linked NextGen CM/ECF account. ADD LINK

To update your Secondary Email Address:

- Once logged into ECF, choose Utilities→Your Account→Maintain Your

Email

- Select a secondary email address to configure.
- Enter/Verify Secondary email addresses as appropriate.
- Click add new email address to add and respond to the questions for each email address.

Once you login to your ECF account click on “Utilities” then “Maintain Your Email.” Click on the email address you need to change or, if you are adding a secondary address, click on the “add new e-mail address” link. After typing a valid email address “Configuration options” will appear for additional customization if needed. Click “Submit all changes” when finished and your account will be updated.

What do I need to file electronically?

- ▶ A personal computer,
- ▶ the ability to create or convert documents into PDF format. (One or more below)
 - Adobe Acrobat (for converting documents to PDF format),
 - A word processor that can create PDFs,
 - a scanner and software to create PDFs.
- ▶ an internet connection to access ECF and email.
- ▶ an approved internet browser. CM/ECF has been tested and works correctly with Internet Explorer (IE), Microsoft Edge, Chrome, Safari and Mozilla Firefox
- ▶ PDF Reader software (such as Adobe Acrobat Reader).
- ▶ An email account.
- ▶ an ECF account.
- ▶ a PACER account.

Adobe Acrobat's **portable document file (PDF)** format is the key to the system. It makes all documents viewable in their original format on any computer regardless of whether they were scanned or created by a word processor.

What is a PDF document?

Documents in **Portable Document File (PDF)** format do not require a copy of the word processing software to be viewed. They can be viewed with a free viewer such as Acrobat Reader, a product of Adobe Systems, Inc. A PDF document closely matches the format of the original document. All pleadings in the CM/ECF system are stored in PDF format. To view PDF files, you must have a PDF viewing software such as Acrobat Reader, which you may download free from the Adobe Systems Internet website

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/>

What is Adobe Acrobat?

Adobe Acrobat is a commercial software product from Adobe that allows you to view and create documents in PDF format. Adobe, the inventors of the PDF format, can be found at <http://www.adobe.com>. You can also find both the free reader version of the software, which can be used to retrieve documents from CM/ECF, and the writer software, which is one way to create documents for posting to CM/ECF. There are other brands of commercially available software to create PDF files. CM/ECF's only requirement is that filings must be in PDF to be accepted by the CM/ECF system. All documents filed in CM/ECF must be in PDF format. The Federal Judiciary does not endorse any specific software.

How do I make a PDF document?

There are several ways in which you can convert a document from a word processing software into PDF format. The newer versions of some common word processors include the ability to publish a document directly to PDF.

Are there size limits for filing PDF documents?

CM/ECF will reject documents which exceed 35 MB. The CM/ECF system will accept both text and imaged PDF files. The text PDF file is usually the result of saving/converting/publishing a document from a word processor in PDF format. Generally, 400-500 pages of converted text will create a file approximately 10MB.

The imaged PDF file is usually created by scanning a paper document in PDF format. Output should be set to grayscale. The Court's standard scanner resolution is 300 dots per inch (DPI) and 150-200 pages of scanned text will be approximately 10MB. Higher resolutions will create much larger file sizes. Color scanning should not be used.

File size can be checked in Adobe Acrobat by typing <CTRL>+D for a document summary. File sizes are listed in KB or kilobytes. 1000KB=1MB. *Take note that the larger the total size of your documents the longer it may take to upload them to ECF.*

If your total document is more than 35 MB, it will need to be split and filed as multiple attachments (i.e., Exhibit 3, Part 1 Depo of John Smith, Pages 1-250; Exhibit 3 Part 2 Depo of John Smith, Pages 251-500.)

Additional information regarding size limits and splitting documents can be found at:

<http://www.scd.uscourts.gov/CMECF/Troubleshooting/PageSizeLimits.pdf>

<http://www.scd.uscourts.gov/CMECF/Troubleshooting/SplittingPDFDocs.pdf>

What is the cost for using CM/ECF?

Attorneys of record and parties in a case (including pro se litigants) receive one free electronic copy of Court approved documents filed electronically. Fees resulting from information retrieval and report generation through CM/ECF are computed by PACER. Each attachment in CM/ECF is considered a separate document.

What constitutes a page in CM/ECF for billing purposes?

Billable pages are calculated in two ways in CM/ECF. A formula is used to determine the number of pages for an HTML formatted report. Any information extracted from the CM/ECF database, such as the data used to create a docket sheet, is billed using a formula based on the number of bytes extracted. For a PDF document, the actual number of pages are counted to determine the number of billable pages.

Printed report data retrieved from the CM/ECF system will not always match the number of pages billed. The number of pages printed is dependent on individual printer and browser settings. All users are charged equally for the same information regardless of the browser settings or printer configurations. A transaction receipt and the "Review Billing History" option are provided in each court site for reviewing charges. Also, "Review Transaction History" is available on this site in "Account Information" for reviewing transactions from all courts. The transactions are updated on the PACER Web Site by the middle of each month.

How do I pay my filing fees in CM/ECF?

Pay.gov is a secure Department of Treasury website which will appear when a docket entry requiring a fee is made. Fee amounts are preprogrammed and must be paid online using a credit card or electronic check. After following the prompts to complete the payment process you will be returned to ECF to complete the docket entry.

For questions regarding Pay.gov call the Court's Finance help desk at (803) 253-3137.

How are electronic documents served?

The CM/ECF system generates a Notice of Electronic Filing -- an email message containing a hyperlink to the document filed -- whenever a document is filed with the Court. The Notice of Electronic Filing is considered service to parties receiving filing by electronic service. It is the responsibility of the filer to serve all non-electronic filers by other means.

Take note that in order to receive uninterrupted electronic service from the Court attorneys are responsible for keeping their ECF accounts up to date with their

current email addresses. Updates can be made by logging into ECF and clicking on the link to “Maintain Your Email” under the Utilities menu.

What if I am not receiving notices of electronic filing (NEF) from the Court?

- ▶ Check your email spam settings and make sure that all mail is accepted from the Court’s email domain (scd.uscourts.gov).
- ▶ Make sure your ECF account is up to date with your most current email address.

What if I am cannot see the Civil or Criminal docketing menus?

- ▶ Make sure you are logged ECF.
- ▶ If you logged in ECF and are still “missing” menu items you will need to clear your cache (also known as deleting your cookies).

Is the CM/ECF system SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) enabled? What is SSL?

Yes. SSL provides endpoint authentication and communications privacy over the Internet using cryptography.

How is filer identity authenticated?

Authentication is currently completed at login. Each user is required to identify himself/herself by presenting a valid combination of a Court assigned user id (login) and password. Upon doing so, access to the site is granted.

How will signatures of documents be handled for documents filed electronically?

At present, this is a matter for local court rule or order. Most courts are currently treating use of an attorney’s unique system login and password along with the attorney’s s/typed name as the attorney’s signature for electronically filed documents.

How many users can submit documents at one time?

There is no fixed limit. Response time and expanded use will ultimately tell the courts what the acceptable limit might be. Enhancements to communications capacity is expected to be an ongoing task to ensure that we meet the needs of users.

Will the creator of the docket entry be identified?

Yes. All entries on the docket can be identified by the name of the person that logged in to the system and submitted the entry. Except for judges, Court users are identified in docket entry text by their initials. Judges and attorneys are

identified by their full names.

How long will it take to transmit/receive documents?

The time it takes to transmit or receive a document primarily depends on the user's Internet Service Provider (ISP), connection speed, and the size of PDF file being transmitted or received. Generally, the larger the file, the longer it will take to load.

What if I receive an email notification that does not provide a hyperlink to the document?

This is not an error. It simply means that a document (PDF) was not electronically filed for that docket entry.

Why am I sometimes prompted for a login and password after clicking on a document hyperlink in an NEF?

- ▶ Document hyperlinks embedded in NEFs expire after two weeks. If your free look has expired, you will need to use your PACER login to view the document.
- ▶ Certain documents have restrictions and are only available to case participants. Such documents require your ECF/PACER login respectively.
- ▶ Criminal cases filed prior to November 2004 are not available electronically.
- ▶ Sealed documents are not available for public review unless otherwise authorized by the Court.

What does this error message mean? “ERROR: Document contains code which may cause an external action (such as launching an application). This PDF document cannot be accepted.”

If your PDF contains **password security**, it will not be accepted. All PDF documents which include embedded JavaScript that use the OpenAction syntax will be rejected. Some petition preparation software contains JavaScript to perform calculations which uses OpenAction syntax. If your PDF is rejected, please contact your PDF software vendor, or petition preparation vendor and speak with them regarding the use of JavaScript OpenAction syntax. OpenAction JavaScript commands can be used to track those who view a PDF and to install malware and viruses.

What does this error message mean? “ ERROR: Document is not a well-formed PDF document (no further information is available).”

This usually means that there is a typographical error in the pathname of the PDF. Use the Browse button rather than manually entering the location of the PDF.

What if I don't know which event to use while e-filing?

Contact the Clerk's office at (803) 765-5816 for assistance.

For additional technical assistance for such issues as listed below contact the PACER Service Center at (800) 676-6856.

- ▶ Getting connected
- ▶ Browser problems
- ▶ Scanning issues and converting to PDF
- ▶ PACER password administration

How do I get additional technical help for CM/ECF?

Call the Court's technical help desk at (803) 253-3605.