

# Guide Series

## HOW FEDERAL LAW IS PUBLISHED

### I. ORDER OF PUBLICATION

#### A. *SLIP LAWS*

The first official publication of federal legislation is in slip law form. Each act is issued individually as a slip of paper or pamphlet. There are two types of laws passed by Congress: *private laws* (pertaining only to the benefit of an individual or group) and *public laws*. Though both have equal status as law, researchers are rarely concerned with private laws. The separately published slip laws are available in the LRC at KF 50 .U52.

Recent legislation can be located in the advance sheets of *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* within a few weeks of passage (discussed below). In addition, many topical looseleaf services reprint legislation within a few days of passage.

**NOTE ON NUMBERING:** Prior to the 85th Congress (1957), all acts were given chapter numbers to designate the order in which they were enacted. Chapter numbering was consecutive, with public and private laws in a single series. Since 1957, all public laws are numbered consecutively in order of approval in one series, with private laws similarly numbered in another series.

**EXAMPLE:** Public Law 96-272 (Pub. L. No. 96-272) was the 272nd law passed during the 96th Congress.

#### B. *SESSION LAWS*

Slip laws are eventually bound in chronological order in volumes called session laws.

##### 1. **OFFICIAL:**

The official compilation of public and private laws is the *United States Statutes at Large* (Stat.) [KF 50 .U52]. Legislation is arranged in chronological order in each volume by public or private law number. The *Statutes at Large* provide the historical record of all legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress. Researchers citing to a piece of legislation in the session laws must make reference to the official compilation. Although volumes are supposed to be issued at the close of a congressional session, publication is actually years behind. Consequently, researchers frequently prefer using an unofficial compilation, such as the *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News*, which is published more quickly.

(OVER)

2. **UNOFFICIAL:**

The *United States Code Congressional and Administrative News* (U.S.C.C.A.N.) [KF 48 .W45] is a publication of West Publishing Company. This set reprints the public laws issued during each session of Congress. Recent legislation can be found in advance sheet pamphlets, which are printed prior to publication of the bound volumes. U.S.C.C.A.N. also includes selected congressional materials (such as committee reports) useful for determining legislative intent. Each year's volumes are roughly divided into two parts; the first volumes of the year contain the public laws, while the later volumes contain legislative histories of selected public laws. The public laws are reprinted using the same page numbers at which they will appear in the *Statutes at Large*. Subject indexes and tables of *U.S. Code* sections affected are included in each pamphlet and in the bound volumes.

C. **CODES**

Since it would be difficult to determine the current status of the law through chronologically published session laws, laws are therefore published in subject arrangements called codes. Codes include statutes in effect at the time of publication. These compilations are updated in a variety of ways, often via pocket part supplements.

1. **OFFICIAL:**

The *United States Code* (U.S.C.) [KF 62 .A2 1994] is divided into 50 broad subject areas called titles. Each title is subdivided into narrower topics called sections, designated by the symbol "§". For example: Title 29 deals with the broad topic of labor, and §185 of that title deals with "suits by and against labor organizations." The *Code* is the official compilation of laws of the United States, and is published by the federal government. It is revised every six years and contains only the legislation in effect at the time of publication. Bound supplement volumes are issued each year to update the set. The U.S.C. does not contain annotations to cases which interpret the statutes. Statutes on particular topics can be found by using the subject index, or one of the tables which indicate where particular public laws are located in the *Code*. When citing federal statutes, the official U.S.C. citation is preferred.

2. **UNOFFICIAL:**

a. The *United States Code Annotated* (U.S.C.A.) [KF 62 .U53] is published by West Publishing Company. This unofficial version of the *Code* is arranged in the same order (titles and sections) as the official version. It is easier to use, however, because it is annually updated by pocket parts and pamphlets containing recent changes in the law. It also contains comprehensive annotations for further research, including references to cases interpreting the sections. Topic and key number references are included to aid research in other West materials. A subject index, various cross-reference tables, and a listing of legislation by popular name are provided.

b. The *United States Code Service* (U.S.C.S.) [KF 62 .U55] is published by Bancroft Whitney/Lawyers' Cooperative Co. and is also arranged by title and section. Like the U.S.C.A., it is more frequently updated than the official *U.S. Code*. This annotated set does not contain as many references to cases as the U.S.C.A., since the editors believe that most researchers seek only a selected number of major cases rather than comprehensive coverage. It does include references to many other sets published by Bancroft-Whitney/Lawyers' Cooperative, as well as to relevant *Code of Federal Regulations* citations. A subject index, various cross-reference tables, and a table of acts by popular name are included.

## II. SAMPLE CITATIONS

<u>PUBLICATION</u>	<u>ABBREVIATION</u>	<u>SAMPLE CITATION</u>
Public Law	P.L.	Pub. L. No. 96-272
United States Statutes at Large	Stat.	94 Stat. 500 (1980)
United States Code Congressional and Administrative News	U.S.C.C.A.N., U.S. Code Cong. & Admin. News	1985 U.S. Code Cong. (99 Stat. 113)
United States Code	U.S.C.	42 U.S.C. § 602 (1982)
United States Code Annotated	U.S.C.A.	42 U.S.C.A. § 602 (West 2001)
United States Code Service	U.S.C.S.	42 U.S.C.S. § 602 (Law. Co-op. 2001)

## III. ONLINE RESOURCES

A. *Public laws:*

<[thomas.loc.gov/](http://thomas.loc.gov/)>.

B. *U.S. Code:*

<[uscode.house.gov/](http://uscode.house.gov/)>

The public laws and current federal statutes can be found on LEXIS and WESTLAW.

**NOTE:** USD's educational contract with LEXIS and WESTLAW limits the use of both systems to currently enrolled law students and law faculty.

**CONTACT A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE**