Eastern District of Virginia
Electronic Case Filing
Policies and Procedures Manual

Chapter Two:
Getting Started

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Getting Started: ECF Definitions

Overview

This section defines the following basic terms associated with electronic case filing:

- Electronic Case Files System (ECF),
- Documents,
- Filing user,
- PDF,
- PACER, and
- Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF).

Electronic Case Files System (ECF)

The *Electronic Case Files system* (*ECF)* refers to the courts' automated system that receives and stores documents filed in electronic form. The program is part of the CM/ECF (Case Management/Electronic Case Files) software which was developed for the Federal Judiciary.

Documents

Documents can be any of the following:

- Pleadings,
- Memoranda,
- Briefs,
- Exhibits,
- Orders,
- Transcripts of depositions actually used in support of motions or at trial, and
- All other writings filed in the Court's case filed by the parties or the Court.

Filing User

A *filing user* is an individual who has a Court-issued login and password that allow the individual to file documents electronically in ECF.

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PDF

PDF stands for *Portable Document Format*. Portable Document Format means that the document's format is device-independent, resolution-independent, and fixed-layout. The document can be viewed as created, regardless of the software that created it, because PDF files do not encode information that is specific to the application software used to create the document.

There are two types of PDF documents:

- Electronically converted PDF documents are created from word processing documents (MS Word, WordPerfect, etc.) using Adobe Acrobat or similar software. Electronically converted PDF documents are text searchable, and their file size is small.
- Scanned Image PDF documents are produced by putting paper documents through an optical scanner. Scanned image PDFs are not text searchable and have a large file size.

Ideally, therefore, whenever possible, filing users should create PDF documents through electronic conversion rather than through scanning.

PACER

PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) is an automated system that allows access to case records over the Internet. Through PACER, an individual can view, print, and download court docket information.

Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF)

A *Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF)* is a notice automatically generated by the CM/ECF system at the time a document is filed with the system.

The NEF gives the following information:

- The time of filing,
- The name of the party and attorney filing the document,
- The type of document,
- The text of the docket entry,
- The name(s) of the party and/or attorney receiving the notice, and
- Electronic links (hyperlinks) to the filed document and the docket report.

Getting Started: System Requirements and PACER Registration

System Requirements

The hardware and software needed to electronically file, view, and retrieve case documents are as follows:

- A personal computer running a standard platform such as Windows or Macintosh.
- A word processing software, such as WordPerfect or Microsoft Word.
- An e-mail account.
  Note: *Make sure that our CM/ECF address (cmecf@vaed.uscourts.gov) will get through your e-mail spam filer, or you won't receive Notices of Electronic Filing (NEFs).*
- Adobe Acrobat software or some other compatible software to convert documents from the format of their native application to portable document format (PDF).
- An Internet service provider and web browser. ECF has been certified to work with Mozilla Firefox version 15.x, Internet Explorer version 9.x and Safari versions 5.1/6.x. The system may work with other browsers, but the Court will not be able to offer any support to people who use other browsers.
- A scanner to convert paper documents not in a word processing format (e.g., medical records filed as exhibits to a document) to a digital format for electronic filing in the Court's ECF system.

Note: Scanners should be used ONLY when a document cannot be electronically prepared with word processing software and converted to PDF. See page 15 of this document for detailed information regarding scanning standards. All documents should be scanned with a "black and white" setting unless the original document is in color.

PACER Registration

Before you can register as an EDVA filing user, you must have a PACER account. With a PACER account, you can view filed documents and use the Query and Report features of the ECF system.

To register for a PACER account, you can either

- Call the PACER Service Center at 800-676-6856 or 210-301-6440 or
- Go to the PACER web site at http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov.

Getting Started: Mandatory Certification, Registration, and Passwords

Mandatory Certification and Registration

Registering to use the Court's ECF system is free and is available through the EDVA Internet site at www.vaed.uscourts.gov.

However, as part of the registration process, registrants must first print out, complete, and sign a mandatory ECF Certification Form that indicates that they

- Are members in good standing of the bar of this Court or are attorneys with the U.S. Attorney's Office and
- Have passed the EDVA online policies and procedures quiz.

Registrants must then mail or deliver the original, signed ECF Certification Form and a photocopy of a government-issued photo id to the following address: ECF Certification, U.S. District Court, EDVA, Clerk's Office, 401 Courthouse Square, Alexandria, VA 22314-5798.

Note: Facsimile or PDFed versions of the ECF Certification Form are not acceptable.

Registrants can then complete and submit the registration form online.

Note: Out-of-District counsel must associate with local counsel who are registered filing users in ECF. Pro hac vice attorneys may not register as ECF filing users.

Logins and Passwords

After you have completed and submitted the online registration form and the clerk's office has received your original, signed ECF Certification Form and photocopy of your photo id, the system will send you an e-mail containing your EDVA ECF login and password. It is your responsibility to safeguard your login and password once you receive it.

Note: Once you have registered, you will start receiving NEFs for any case in which you are the counsel of record.

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Login and Password Security

Filing users' login and password constitute their official signature on all documents filed using that login and password.

Filing users must therefore do the following:

- Safeguard their login and password.
- Protect their login and password from unauthorized use.
- Notify the clerk's office immediately if they discover that someone has used their login and password without permission.

Note: One way to check for unauthorized use is to check the bottom left corner of the main ECF program screen, which indicates the last date logged into the system. If you believe that your last login date and time are incorrect, or suspect that an unauthorized party is using your login and password, you should immediately notify the clerk's office by calling the appropriate ECF help desk phone number.

Changing the Password

Once you receive your login and password, you can change your password to one easier to remember by taking the following steps:

Step	Action
1	Log into ECF.
2	Click on *Utilities* on the upper right side of the main blue menu bar.
3	Click on *Maintain Your Password*.
4	• Enter your new password in the password box by using your mouse to highlight the asterisks in the white box and then typing the new password. • Click the *Submit* button.
5	Click *Logout* on the upper right side of the main blue menu bar.

Note: You may now log back in using your new password. It is very important that you record your new password and keep it in a safe place. The clerk's office does not maintain a record of your password. If you forget your password, the CM/ECF system has to issue you a new one.

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Receiving a New Password

If you forget your password, to receive a new password, you must do the following:

- Click on the *Forgotten Password* button on the CM/ECF page of the EDVA Internet site at www.vaed.uscourts.gov.
- Fill out and submit the online form. Once you have submitted the form, your ECF password will be reset, and your login and new password will be e-mailed to you.

Note: The information you provide on the Forgotten Password form must be an exact match with the information already in the system in order for your password to be reset.

Delegation of Authority to Use Login and Password

Attorneys may allow a secretary, paralegal, or other person in their office to use their login and password to file documents on their behalf.

However, attorneys should remember that

- Their login and password constitute their signature, regardless of whether they personally use the login and password or delegate that authority to someone else.
- They are responsible for safeguarding and protecting their login and password at all times.

Getting Started: Training

Mandatory Certification

Attorneys must certify that they have acquired knowledge about ECF and EDVA's ECF policies before they can register to e-file in EDVA.

Attorneys can meet this mandatory certification requirement by passing the EDVA online policies and procedures quiz.

Online Tutorial

The online tutorial is designed for attorneys and law firm staff interested in learning how to use the CM/ECF system. It contains guided practice and simulated CM/ECF screens and actions. The menus and screens in the tutorial are designed to give you a feel for how the system works. They do not look and work exactly like EDVA's CM/ECF system functions. The tutorial uses simulated CM/ECF screens -- users do not upload files to the Court's server.

The tutorial is divided into four modules, each of which contains sections that guide you through specific CM/ECF functions for civil and criminal filings. The tutorial is self-paced: at any point, you can bookmark your place and return when it is convenient for you. The entire tutorial takes about one hour to complete.

The online tutorial may be found on the PACER web site at http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/cmecf/dc/.

Online EDVA Policies Presentation

An online presentation overview of the EDVA's policies governing e-filing in the Eastern District of Virginia may be found through EDVA's CM/ECF training page on its Internet site at www.vaed.uscourts.gov.

Online Quiz: Overview

The EDVA online policies and procedures quiz, along with details about taking and passing the quiz, may be found through EDVA's CM/ECF training page on its Internet site at www.vaed.uscourts.gov. The quiz consists of 25 multiple choice questions and may be taken open-book.

Getting Started: PDF and Document Size Requirements

PDF Software

Filing users must have PDF capability both to view and to create electronically filed documents.

To view documents that have been electronically filed with the clerk's office, filing users must install PDF conversion software.

To create documents in PDF, filing users must have software that converts electronic files from any application to Portable Document Format (PDF). All new documents prepared for ECF cases must be converted to PDF before they are entered into ECF or transmitted to the Court.

Note: The ECF system may reject non-text PDFs. If you attempt to attach such a PDF, the system will give you an error message stating that your document is not a valid PDF.

Converting Documents to PDF

Converting documents to PDF requires special software (e.g., Adobe Acrobat Writer, later versions of WordPerfect, or another word-processing application with built-in PDF conversion capabilities).

To learn more about converting documents to PDF, go to the computer-based training module at http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/ecfcbt/dc/cccnvtpdf/.

Viewing a PDF Document

Once you have converted a document to PDF, you should view it as a PDF document to ensure that the conversion worked correctly and that you converted the correct document.

To view a PDF document, take the following steps:

Step	Action
1	Open Adobe Acrobat or Acrobat Reader.
2	Select *File* on the menu bar and choose *Open* from the drop-down window.
3	Click on the location and file name of the PDF document you wish to view.
4	Click on the *View* menu for other options for viewing the displayed document. Choose the option that best suits your viewing needs.

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Scanning Standards

Scanned images of textual records transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration must meet the following minimum requirements for scanning resolution and pixel (bit) depth to support archival preservation and continued use.

The acceptable image quality specifications are:

- 3.2.1 Bitonal (1-bit) scanned at 300-600 ppi – This is appropriate for documents that consist exclusively of clean printed type possessing high inherent contrast (e.g., laser printed or typeset on a white background). Scanning at 600 ppi is recommended.
- 3.2.2 Gray scale (8-bit) scanned at 300-400 ppi – This is appropriate for textual documents of poor legibility because of low inherent contrast, staining, or fading (e.g., carbon copies, thermofax, or documents with handwritten annotations or other markings), or that contain halftone illustrations or photographs. Scanning at 400 ppi is recommended.
- 3.2.3 Color (24-bit RGB [Red, Green, Blue] scanned at 300-400 ppi – Color mode (if technically available) is appropriate for text containing color information important to interpretation or content. Scanning at 400 ppi is recommended.

***Note**:*

- ppi denotes pixels per inch, and
- All documents should be scanned with a “black and white” setting unless otherwise ordered by the court.

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Document Size Requirements

- Only PDF documents will be accepted by the system, and each PDF document filed electronically must be no larger than 10.0 megabytes (10,000 kilobytes or about 200 pages).
- Any documents larger than 10.0 megabytes will be automatically rejected by the system.
- If you have a document or filing, including attachments, larger than 10.0 megabytes but less than 30 megabytes, you can break that document or filing into smaller PDF documents, each one of which is less than the 10.0 megabyte limit. You can file those smaller PDF documents together as one event, with your pleading as the main document and the remaining documents as separate attachments to the main document.
- If your total filing, including attachments, is larger than 30 megabytes (about 600 pages), then split your filing into submissions of no larger than 30 megabytes each. File each submission, using the table below to guide you in filing the second and any other submissions.

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Documents Over 30 MB

Take the following steps to file documents that are larger than 30 megabytes:

Step	Action
1	Break your document or filing, including attachments, into smaller PDF documents of no more than 10.0 megabytes each and into submissions of less than 30 megabytes each.
2	File the first submission as usual (as a main document with attachments).
3	Create a formal document entitled *Notice of Submission of* (fill in what you are submitting) that includes a Certificate of Service. Both the *Notice of Submission* and the Certificate of Service for the *Notice of Submission* should have the filing user's (your) complete nine-element signature block.
4	File the *Notice of Submission* document using the event *Notice (other)* found under the category *Notices* and, when prompted by the system, link this Notice event to your original filing (first submission).
5	Modify the text of the docket event in the white text box to include a description of what you are submitting (e.g., Exhibits D-F) that matches the title of your *Notice of Submission* document.
6	Upload the smaller PDF documents as attachments to the *Notice of Submission*.