Finding Statutes

Introduction

Statutes are laws enacted by a legislature, generally requiring approval by the executive, whether the governor at the state level or the President at the federal level. It is always important to check to see if a statute relevant to your issue exists, and if it has been interpreted in the courts. We will be primarily discussing (U.S.) federal statutes, but the general principles will also apply to state statutory research.

In Print

Statutes are usually published in three different forms:

1. They are first published in print as **slip laws**, which are individual copies of laws published shortly after they are enacted. They have no index because each is published separately.

2. Next, they are published as **session laws**, which are chronological compilations of the laws passed by a particular legislature for each session. The session laws index only covers that particular session of the legislature.

3. Finally, they are included in subject order in **codes**, which are subject arrangements of all current laws of general application at a particular point in time. An annotated code includes, in addition to the text of the statutes, references to cases, other statutes, regulations, and other research aids. Codes are kept up to date with pocket parts and supplemental volumes, which must always be checked. There is an index covering the entire code, usually at the end of the set, and other finding aids, such as a Popular Name Table.

Federal Statutes

1. **Slip laws** - are individual laws with a unique identifying number: e.g., Pub. L. No. 105-23, meaning the 23rd public law passed in the 105th Congress. They are of value when legislation has been passed quite recently.

Slip laws are available on the fifth floor in our Government Documents collection, under the Superintendents of Documents (SuDoc) classification number AE 2.111:.

On LEXIS: go to the source directory, select "Federal Legal - U.S.", then "United States Codes Service (USCS) Materials," then "USCS - Public Laws."P

On WESTLAW: Public laws are in the **US-PL** database.

On the Internet: Slip laws are published on
Thomas (http://thomas.loc.gov/), the Library of Congress site, beginning with the 93rd Congress (1973-74).

GPO Access (http://www.gpoaccess.gov/plaws/index.html) has slip laws, beginning with the 104th Congress (1995-96).

2. **Session laws** –For federal statutes are published in the Statutes at Large, which are in Government Documents at SuDoc classification AE 2.111:. They are also available, in image format, for the years 1789-1972, in WESTLAW's **US-STATLRG** database.

3. **Codes** - the official code is the United States Code (U.S.C., KF62 .A2), located in Range 319 of the Federal Section on the third floor. It does not have case annotations--e.g., references to cases interpreting a statute or other research aids.

To get annotations as well as code articles, search the *United States Code Annotated* (U.S.C.A.), located in Range 319 of the Federal Section and in the Reading Room. There is a second commercially published annotated source called *The United States Code Service* (U.S.C.S.) but the library no longer keeps it up-to-date.

On LEXIS, the U.S.C.S. is available. Go to the source directory, select "Federal Legal - U.S.", then "United States Code Service - Titles 1 through 50" or "United States Code Service (USCS) Materials."

On WESTLAW, the U.S.C.A. is available in the **USCA** database.

On the Internet:

The (unannotated) U.S. Code is available at

Cornell's Legal Information Institute

http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/ and

The House of Representatives website

http://uscode.house.gov/

For More Information on Federal Statutes

How our Law are Made, revised and updated by Charles W. Johnson Parliamentarian, United States House of Representatives
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html

State Statutes

State statutes follow a similar pattern of publication--e.g., slip laws, session laws, and codes. State statutes for all fifty states are located alphabetically by state in the State section on the third floor, but only those for California, Louisiana, Texas and New York are up-to-date. For the other states, consult LEXIS or WESTLAW.

On LEXIS and WESTLAW:

On WESTLAW: the databases for state codes are in the form XX-ST-ANN (for annotated codes) and XX-ST (for unannotated code), where the first two letters are the postal code abbreviation for the state.

On LEXIS: go to the source directory, select “States Legal - U.S.,” then choose the appropriate state.

On the Internet:

Legal Information Institute State Legal Materials
http://www.law.cornell.edu/states/listing.html

Findlaw's State Laws
http://www.findlaw.com/11stategov/indexcode.html