



Biddle Law Library

University of Pennsylvania

Keys to Success Series

FEDERAL STATUTES

AN OVERVIEW

A *statute* is the formal written enactment of a legislative body. Statutes are primary sources of law which, along with the cases that interpret them, are frequently cited in all forms of legal documents.

The legislative enactments of the United States Congress are called *federal statutes*. If a federal statute treats the law of a given subject, it is mandatory authority and must be examined carefully.

Federal statutes are published in three formats: Slip Laws, Session Laws and Codes.

SLIP LAWS

A *slip law* is the first official version of a newly enacted statute. Each slip law is issued as a single pamphlet with its own pagination.

Slip laws are available in print on the 4th Floor of Biddle, shelved immediately after U.S. Statutes at Large [KF 50 U5]. However, since publication in print is much slower than in digital format, recently enacted statutes are most readily obtained on Westlaw, Lexis or the Internet (see below).

SESSION LAWS

The statutes passed during each individual session of Congress are known as *session laws*. It is essential to consult session laws if you want to know exactly what Congress enacted in a given year, or need to find laws enacted too recently to have appeared in codified form yet.

After first appearing as slip laws, statutes are collected and published chronologically in bound volumes of session laws in U. S. Statutes at Large [KF 50 U5], available back to 1789 on the 4th Floor of Biddle. Each volume of Statutes at Large

has a subject and popular name index to assist in finding session laws.

Each session law is assigned a public law number, by which it is cited, e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 327. In this example, Pub. L. No. 101-336 refers to the 336th statute enacted by the 101st Congress. This law can be found in volume 104 of Statutes at Large, beginning on page 327.

CODIFIED STATUTES

Codified statutes are current laws arranged by subject rather than chronologically, with obsolete earlier laws dropped. As a result, federal statutes are most frequently used and cited in one of their codified forms: the U.S. Code, the U.S. Code Annotated, and the U.S. Code Service.

The U.S. Code (U.S.C.) [KF62 2000 A2], first published in 1926, is the official government publication for codified statutes. The U.S. Code is arranged into 50 subject areas, each known as a *title*. Titles are subdivided into *chapters* and then *sections*. A citation to 11 U.S.C. 507(a)(3) therefore refers to title 11, section 507, sub-section a(3), of the U.S. Code. Current volumes of U.S.C. are available on the 4th floor of Biddle. Superseded volumes are shelved in the Lewis Collection in Silverman Hall and may be requested through the Circulation Desk.

The U.S. Code Annotated (U.S.C.A.) [KF62 1927 W45] is a commercial publication produced by the West Group. U.S.C.A. mirrors the arrangement of the U.S. Code, and also provides useful information in the form of *annotations* to the statutory language. For example, a statute in U.S.C.A. can contain references to related sections of the Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) and to legislative history materials in the U.S. Code Congressional and Administrative News (U.S.C.C.A.N.). In addition, U.S.C.A. contains abstracts of judicial decisions which have considered the particular

section of the Code under which they are found. Current volumes of U.S.C.A. are available on the 4th floor of Biddle. Superseded volumes are shelved in the Lewis Collection in Silverman Hall and may be requested through the Circulation Desk.

The U.S. Code Service (U.S.C.S.) [KF62 1972 L38] is a commercial publication produced by Lexis Law Publishing. Like U.S.C.A., U.S.C.S. follows the title arrangement found in the U.S. Code and contains numerous notes, cross-references and abstracts of judicial decisions. However, it carries far fewer digests of decisions than U.S.C.A., limiting its coverage to those decisions its publisher deems most relevant. Current volumes of U.S.C.S., are available on the 4th floor of Biddle. Superseded volumes are shelved in the Lewis Collection in Silverman Hall and may be requested through the Circulation Desk.

WHERE TO FIND FEDERAL STATUTES

Federal statutes are available in the print sources above, and are also accessible online on commercial databases such as Westlaw and Lexis Nexis, and on free Internet sites.

Slip laws and *session laws* are available at no cost in PDF format at two federal government sites, [Federal Digital System](http://www.fdsys.gov) (FDsys) (www.fdsys.gov) and [THOMAS](http://thomas.loc.gov/) (thomas.loc.gov/). These sites also provide free access to current bills.

In addition, slip laws and session laws can be found on Westlaw [US-PL for the current session; US-PL-OLD for earlier years] and Lexis [PUBLAW]. Both services also provide access to Statutes at Large.

Codified laws are freely available at the website of the [Office of the Law Revision Council](http://uscode.house.gov/search/criteria.shtml) (<http://uscode.house.gov/search/criteria.shtml>), which prepares the U.S.C. [Cornell University's Legal Information Institute](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/) (www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/) also provides a searchable version of the U.S.C. Westlaw carries the U.S.C. [USC] and U.S.C.A. [USCA], while Lexis carries the U.S.C.S. (USCODE).

HOW TO USE FEDERAL STATUTES

How to Find a Statute by Subject or Popular Name

When you know the topic or subject matter of a statute, use the alphabetical General Index in U.S.C., U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S. to locate all statutes dealing with that subject.

If you know the common or popular name of a law, use the Popular Name Index in U.S.C., U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S.

Note that the various versions of the U.S. Code contain the United States Constitution (Title 1), the Rules of Federal Civil Procedure (Title 28), Rules of Federal Criminal Procedure (Title 18), Federal Sentencing Guidelines (Title 18), the Rules of Appellate Procedure (Title 28), and the Federal Rules of Evidence (Title 28).

How to Move Between Types of Citation

If you have a Statutes at Large citation, you can find the corresponding U.S. Code sections by using the table captioned "Statutes at Large" in the Tables volumes in U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S.

To go from a U.S. Code Section to a Statutes at Large or a Public Law citation, check the historical notes section found after the statute's text in U.S.C.S. or U.S.C.A.. Cross-references will refer you back to the original Statutes at Large citation, including the Public Law Number.

How to Update Statutes

Statutes can be updated in print through pocket parts and supplementary pamphlets to U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S. Pocket parts, which are annual supplements, are found in the back cover of each volume of the U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S. Pamphlets are updates issued every few months, between the annual pocket part updates. Pamphlets are free-standing and can be found on the shelf beside their respective volume. Both of these sources provide recent information about a statute's validity and amendment.

The KeyCite service on Westlaw and the Shepard's service on Lexis can also be used to update a statute online, by using the U.S.C.A. or U.S.C.S. databases respectively, or the corresponding slip law databases.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For additional guidance on federal statutory research, consult the book *How to Find the Law*, Ninth Edition 1989, by Morris L. Cohen, Robert C. Berring and Kent C. Olsen [KF240.C538/1989]. Chapter 5, "Statutes," pp. 143-176, discusses statutory research in depth. Copies of this title are located in the Ready Reference area, the Reserved Reading Room and Closed Reserve.