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INTERNET RESOURCES FOR NON-LAW RESEARCHERS

Search engines work well for finding specific information (facts, companies, people with distinctive names, documents, etc.), but may provide hundreds of irrelevant hits when searching for topical information. Begin, instead, with the web site of a special library, government agency, trade association or advocacy group related to the topic of your research.

Government agencies often have web sites and offer full-text versions of their key publications. They also offer access to free materials, resource people, and contact information. Depository libraries such as the Wyoming State Library provide access to government documents. The regional depository library has the most complete collection of government documents. The [University of Colorado at Boulder Library](#) and the [Denver Public Library](#) are both regional libraries. They automatically receive all titles and must keep them permanently.

The Virtual Chase by Genie Tyburski is a source for internet legal research. <http://www.virtualchase.com/>.

She lists five criteria to consider when evaluating the quality of information on the internet or in print:

- scope of coverage - the extent to which a source explores a topic
- authority - the expertise or recognized official status of a source
- objectivity - the bias or opinion expressed when a writer interprets or analyzes facts
- accuracy - information that is factually irrefutable and complete
- timeliness - information that is current at the time of publication

When evaluating information, identify the source by checking domain ownership, read the "about us" section and author bios, and keep in mind that anyone can publish a web site. Question whether the source is an expert by looking to find other books or articles in print by the author and examine the grammar and spelling of the content. Is a balanced viewpoint provided? Establish the date of publication by looking at creation and revision dates. Avoid undated information. Verify what the information claims with two or more reliable sources.

When deciding where to research, either the library or the internet and when evaluating the results of your search, consider how important the answer will be. Know when to consult a specialist.

Internet Resources: Legislative

THOMAS <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and **GPO Access** <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/> are essential congressional research systems sponsored by the legislative branch of the U.S. government. Both are available online for free.

THOMAS's strength is the integration of data and documents from many legislative sources, including GPO Access. GPO's focus, and its strength, is providing online versions of official documents.

Key Documents on GPO Access and THOMAS

Bills & Resolutions, all versions, full text
THOMAS – 1989 (101st Congress) to present
GPO Access – 1993 (103rd Congress) to present

Committee Reports
THOMAS – 1995 (104th Congress) to present
GPO Access - 1995 (104th Congress) to present

Congressional Record (Daily Edition)
THOMAS – 1989 (101st Congress) to present
GPO Access – 1994 (103rd Congress, 2nd session) to present

Each system is updated throughout the day. Some tips for searching include:

- Read the search help and consult the sample searches that both sites provide for each of their databases.
- On GPO Access, remember that you must use double quotes or a Boolean AND to get results that include all of your search words. A space in GPO Access is interpreted as a Boolean OR.
- THOMAS provides some flexibility in word or topic searching. The word/phrase search box on most of its databases has the option to search for exact matches or for plurals and other variations.

Legislative history refers to the progress of a bill through the legislative process and to the documents that are created during that process. Attorneys, judges, and others often turn to these documents to learn why Congress enacted a particular law or to aid in the interpretation of a law. This can include committee reports, bills and their amendments, sponsor remarks, and committee hearings. Federal legislative history:

<http://lib.law.washington.edu/ref/fedlegishist.html> (M.G. Gallagher Law Library).

The University of Wyoming provides an explanation of legislative research with links to resources for Wyoming legislative history through *Compiling Wyoming Legislative Histories* at:

http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/LawLib/guides/wyo_legis_hist.asp.

Internet Resources: Administrative

Research in administrative law is supported by the *Federal Register*, *Code of Federal Regulations*, the *U.S. Government Manual* and agency web sites. [*Tapping the Government Grapevine*](#) by Judith Schiek Robinson is an excellent guide to U.S. government information resources.

Regulations (or rules) are a means of implementing laws enacted by Congress. Congress delegates authority to an agency to implement legislation by writing rules that itemize procedures and details. The *Federal Register* <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> announces early and final draft proposed rules and invites public input by publishing contact information with guidelines for comments. Regulations published in the Federal Register are cited by volume and page, with the date sometimes added in parentheses. [46 FR 3566 (1981)].

The *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/> is a soft-bound subject arrangement of the rules in force. It systematically arranges the rules and regulations under 50 subject titles, chapters, parts and sections. The “section” is where the actual text of the regulation appears. It is cited as [40 CFR 211.10 (1978)]. Begin research for a regulation by looking in the *CFR*.

U.S. Government Manual: official handbook of the Federal Government at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual/>. It provides comprehensive information about the agencies of each branch of the government. It also includes information on quasi-official agencies, international organizations in which

the United States participates, and boards, commissions, and committees. The home page provides a link to Federal Agency Internet Sites. [The law library has the print version.](#)

The **Agency Guidance Table** <http://www.washlaw.edu/doclaw/executive5m.html> takes the researcher to a WashLaw page which shows agencies in a table format with direct links to the information you may be seeking, such as forms or contact information.

Administrative Decisions & Other Actions http://www.lib.virginia.edu/govdocs/fed_decisions_agency.html is from the University of Virginia library with links to administrative actions that are outside the scope of the *CFR* or *FR*.

The Library of Congress hosts a page of **Executive Branch Agencies** at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/fedgov.html>. There are also links from that page to search further.

The **Council of State Governments** located at <http://www.csg.org/> is a resource for state government. It is the premier multi-branch organization forecasting policy trends for the community of states, commonwealths and territories on a national and regional basis. They advocate multi-state problem-solving to maximize resources and competitiveness. [The law library has the print version available.](#)

Internet Resources: Judicial

LLRX: <http://www.llrx.com/> has a very useful link for Court Rules & Forms at <http://www.llrx.com/courtrules/>. This link provides access to over 1400 sources for state and federal court rules, forms and dockets. This site is produced by two professional law librarians and legal researchers.

LII: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/> is a research and electronic publishing activity of the Cornell Law School. The Institute publishes electronic versions of core materials in numerous areas of the law.

FindLaw: <http://www.findlaw.com/> provides links to subject matter, state and federal regulations, and locating a lawyer. It includes access to sample forms and articles that discuss the area of law you are researching.

WashLaw: <http://www.washlaw.edu/> from the Washburn School of Law is a portal site for legal research. It is possible to go to WashLaw and navigate from it to the government or administrative sites you need. It provides links to state, federal and international law.

Abbreviations

A., A.2d	Atlantic Reporter, Atlantic Reporter second series – part of West’s national reporter system
A.L.R.	American Law Reports Annotated – 5 ordinal series and also Fed. Series
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
F., F.2d, F.3d	Federal Reporter, second and third series – publishes decisions from the Circuit Courts of Appeals
F.R.	Federal Register – publishes daily federal; agency information including proposed and final rules and regulations
F. Supp., F.Supp.2d	Federal Supplement and second series – publishes decisions form the US District Courts
P., P.2d, P.3d	Pacific Reporter, second and third series – regional reporter that includes decisions from Wyoming – part of West’s national reporter system
U.S.C.	United States Code – official codification of the laws of United States
U.S.C.A.	United States Code Annotated – unofficial codification of the laws of United States by Thompson/West
U.S.C.C.A.N.	United States Code Congressional & Administrative News – Thompson/West – reprints Public Laws and senate reports, committee reports (selective legislative history)
U.S.C.S.	United States Code Service – unofficial codification of laws of United States by Lexis Law Publishing