

A Guide to Researching U.S. Space Law On-Line (U.S. Space Law Research Guide)

The Center receives many requests from around the world for assistance in researching U.S. space law. Most of them are from people who do not have access to law libraries and materials. Therefore, this Guide is intended to provide access to authoritative sources of United States space law. It is updated as necessary.

Regarding executive orders and directives, as well as proposed legislation, reports and position papers on space law and policy etc., the reader is advised to consult a number of authoritative, official websites provided by the United States Government. There are a number of on-line sites that purport to compile space law but they are unofficial and often out of date. They are not the best sources to cite in legal writings. If you find a source on one of these sites, the reader is advised to confirm that source on an official website and cite it, not the secondary compilation.

The best official sources are the United States Library of Congress at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>, which provides a searchable database of existing and pending U.S. legislation. The U.S. Government Printing Office provides two searchable databases. The first is for the U.S. Code, which is the codification by subject matter of U.S. general and permanent laws, at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/>. The second is for the U.S. general and permanent regulations published in the Federal Register by the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/>. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration Office of the General Counsel is available at <http://www.nasa.gov/offices/ogc/about/index.html> and the United States Department of Defense Office of the General Counsel can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/dodgc/>.

In addition to the Library of Congress and the U.S. Code sites, specific space laws can be found in different places on-line. U.S. remote sensing law and regulations are available from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Satellite and Information Service at <http://www.licensing.noaa.gov/>. The law and regulations regarding space transportation are available from the Federal Aviation Administration Office of Commercial Space Transportation at <http://ast.faa.gov/>. The National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958 is at http://www.nasa.gov/offices/ogc/about/space_act1.html; the Space Act Agreements Manual is at <http://www.nasa.gov/offices/ogc/about/samannual.html> and the Commercial Space Act of 1998 is at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c105:H.R.1702.ENR:>.

Additional official U.S. Government websites with law and policy materials include the General Accountability Office at <http://www.gao.gov/>; the Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center of the United States Air Force Air University at <http://www.maxwell.af.mil/au/aul/lane.htm>; the Office of Science and Technology Policy Executive Office of the President at <http://www.ostp.gov/> and its space related materials are at <http://www.ostp.gov/nstc/html/nstc.html>. Information from and about the entire Federal Government can be accessed at <http://www.firstgov.gov/>. Most official websites contain the name and contact information for a specific individual person who is responsible for assisting with website use or providing additional information.

Unofficial government sites that provide good information include <http://www.opencrs.com/>, which provides reports from the Congressional Research Service; and, <http://www.wws.princeton.edu/ota/>, which provides reports from the now defunct Office of Technology Assessment.

As these websites demonstrate, over the past five decades a substantial amount of United States space legislation and regulations have been enacted regarding national and commercial space programs. In the United States Code, some of these provisions have been placed under title 42 (Public Health and Welfare) and others have been placed under title 15 (Commerce and Trade). Because the organizational scheme for the Code was originally established in 1926, well before the beginning of space activities, no distinct title for national and commercial space programs currently exists.