

Court Case Management Evolution

March 2014

Criminal e-file

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www.albertacourts.ab.ca

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The RCS registration form can be obtained through the Alberta Courts website albertacourts@gov.ab.ca

Take your completed form along with your bar card to any Provincial Court Criminal Office and sign up! The criminal e-file initiative is designed to move the provincial criminal courts and the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service (ACPS) towards an electronic, paperless system.

During the second week of March, the CCM project team assisted in conducting a pilot project in the Edmonton ACPS office testing the functionality of the document management system called OpenText. The pilot involved the intake and disclosure unit staff, some legal assistants, and some prosecutors. They were involved in the screening of files, testing the usability of OpenText and providing their feedback. The participants worked with files that had been ingested in OpenText for testing purposes. They were provided with instructions and guidelines to help them test the files. Thirty files were successfully redacted by the disclosure clerks. They provided valuable feedback and identified issues concerning the ease of redaction. This gives better information for future development. At present the files are split into separate documents for ease of searching. In the future, it is anticipated the system will be able to merge the documents to speed up the redaction.

E Informations Proof of Concept

A proof of concept has being undertaken to determine the suitability of the electronic transfer of charge documents including Informations. Testing the capability of different systems (Accellion and OpenText) to apply an electronic signature to court documents has been successfully completed. This proof of concept is being done in conjunction with

the Criminal e-file initiative undertaken by the Edmonton Police Service and ACPS to deliver prosecution packages electronically.

Defence Access to Disclosure

Several Edmonton defence council graciously agreed to participate in the pilot project testing a link to OpenText that provides access to electronic disclosure documents. The pilot tested a link sent via e-mail to an individual defence counsel enabling them to open up the link on their own computers in the their offices. We received some very good feedback from the participants. Some of the positive remarks addressed the ease of access to the documents and the speed at which the documents loaded. More discussion will take place on the document formatting and how documents will be named.

The participation of defence counsel has helped us move toward a solution that will ultimately provide enormous benefits. When the electronic process becomes generally available, there will be no need to go to the prosecutors office to collect disclosure or send runners to pick it up. Any defence counsel who is registered on RCS can download the disclosure documents from the comfort of their home or office. The time and money savings to defence should be significant. Whether law offices choose to view the documents on line or print them is up to the offices themselves, but it will be possible to avoid printing costs by storing the documents electronically.



Provincial Court Returns to Turner Valley

This spring the doors are set to open on the Turner Valley Provincial Court. It has been twenty years since Turner Valley has had a courthouse at that location. The old courthouse closed in 1994 and moved its cases to Okotoks Provincial Court. In recent years, Okotoks has faced an increasing volume of cases that are heard in that jurisdiction. As the population in that community has continued to grow, so have the challenges in providing timely access to justice. Discussions started in 2010 to re-open the Turner Valley courthouse in order to alleviate the backlog of cases. This is an important step in addressing the Alberta Crown Prosecutions Service concern with Askov cases. R. v Askov was a case heard by the Supreme Court of Canada which determined that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be tried within a reasonable time. This matter was dealt with in the ACPS "Injecting a Sense of Urgency" report of last year. Additional courtrooms will help address the concerns about systemic delays in moving cases to completion.

One advantage of the new Turner Valley Provincial Court is it will begin operations with a Case Management Office Counter (CMO). All of Calgary Regional Courts will now be "CMO Friendly", as this completes the Court Case Management expansion to all of the Calgary Regional Court areas (Airdrie, Canmore, Didsbury, Okotoks and Turner Valley - excluding Tsuu T'ina Nation Court). The first scheduled sitting day is May 6, 2014.

The success of the expansion of the Court Case Management Program to these areas is due to the dedication, commitment and perseverance of the Calgary Regional Court Team.



Above-The new Turner Valley Provincial Court Top right-The Turner Valley courthouse in 1968 Bottom right-The Case Management Office (CMO) in the courthouse



