

What is the CPC system?

What is a patent classification system?

Patent documents are assigned at least one patent classification indicating the subject to which the invention relates (the focus of the claimed invention). Searchers and Examiners use a patent classification to find other documents disclosing similar inventive concepts.

Existing Major Systems prior to CPC:

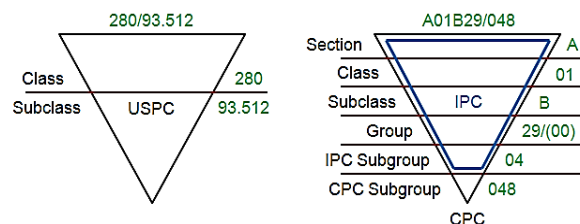
- United States Patent Classifications (USPC)
- European Classifications (ECLA)
- International Patent Classification (IPC)

What is the CPC?

CPC stands for Cooperative Patent Classification. The CPC system is jointly developed by the European Patent Office (EPO) and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). CPC is substantially based on the previous ECLA system, which itself was a more specific and detailed version of the IPC system. The USPC and ECLA systems have become static classification systems, in that no more patent documents are being classified in these systems (although some databases still contain this information for older documents), and the CPC system has replaced USPC and ECLA classifications for patent documents issued in the past by the EPO and USPTO.

How do CPC classifications compare?

CPC provides for a greater division of technology definitions into more groups and subgroups providing for better delineations of the patents and lowering the number of documents in each subgroup. These classifications may also be referred to as "codes" or "symbols" in some documentation.



What countries use CPC?

The EPO and USPTO are utilizing CPC, and many other countries are starting to classify their own patent documents using CPC also, such as China (SIPO), Russia (Rospatent), Brazil (INPI), and Korea (KIPO).

Useful CPC Resources:

CPC EPO USPTO Joint General Website:

<http://www.CPCinfo.org>

(leads to same page as previous one) EPO and USPTO Guide to the CPC

<http://www.cooperativepatentclassification.org/publications/GuideToTheCPC.pdf>

Espacenet – EPO public search tool

<http://worldwide.espacenet.com>

Search Training

USPTO 7-Step Search Process

http://www.uspto.gov/products/library/ptdl/services/7_Step_US_Patent_Search_Strategy_Guide_2014.pdf

CPC Online Resources and Training Materials

<http://cooperativepatentclassification.org/Training.html>

EPO Online Training for Searching and CPC

<http://www.epo.org/learning-events/e-learning.html>

Government contacts for CPC questions

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Patent Searching

Using Class Codes - Cooperative Patent Classifications (CPC)



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How are CPC codes assigned?

Respectively as of 2013 and of 2015, the EPO and the USPTO are assigning CPC codes to patent documents at the time of publication. The USPTO and EPO have no longer publically assigned USPC and ECLA codes since those times.

Serco Inc., under the direction and guidance of the USPTO, classifies US patent application (pre-grant) publications while US patent examiners classify US granted patents.

EPO patent examiners classify both EPO patent application publications and EPO granted patents as well as a series of non-EPO published patent documents.

At any time after publication, either the USPTO or the EPO may add additional CPC codes to a patent document record; however, only the organization who assigned a specific CPC code may remove it. For example, if the USPTO reviews an EPO patent document and believes one or more CPC codes may more accurately reflect the claimed technology, the USPTO may add the CPC and may also make a change recommendation to the CPC codes previously assigned by the EPO. The change recommendation is electronically routed to the EPO for approval. The removal of the EPO originated CPC codes will only take place if the EPO approves the change. The reverse of the change recommendation process is equally true for the EPO.

As well, the CPC system allows for USPTO and EPO Examiners, in committee, to modify the CPC scheme to further redefine groups and subgroups as technology progresses, so that many CPC classifications may also change over the course of the years due to this evolution of the scheme itself.

USPTO and EPO file servers synchronize at regular intervals to maintain consistency between the USPTO and EPO current CPC databases.

Important to know

- US Patent Classification (USPC) remains available for searching US patents from 1790 to the end of 2014 in US patent document databases. However, USPC will no longer be publically available to newly issued utility patents starting in 2015.
- USPTO indicates that CPC classifications are available for all US patent documents since 1836.
- US design patents and plant patents are not currently being classified in CPC, only USPC.

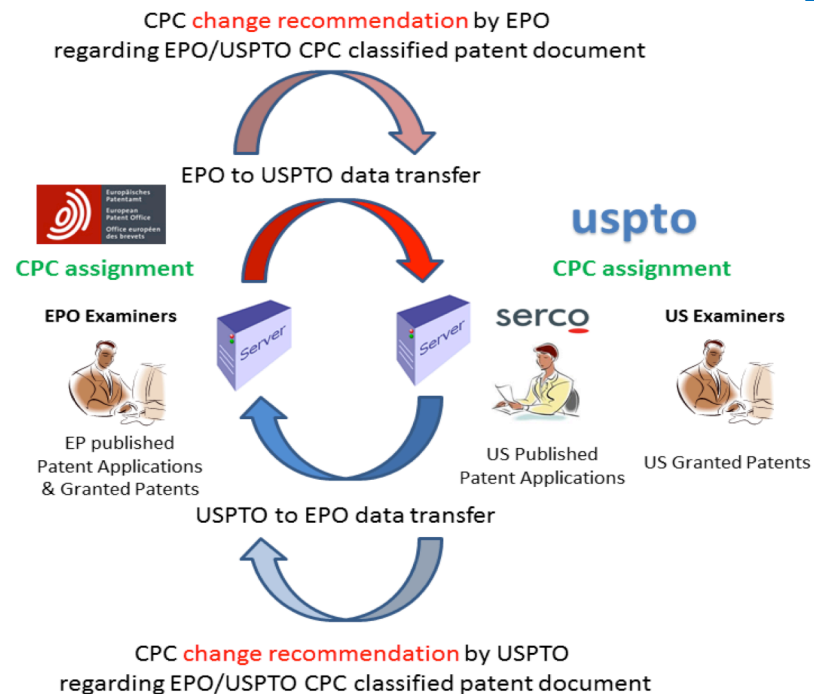
How are CPC codes managed?

How will database programs be updated?

In general, the databases add all the EPO and USPTO originated CPC codes assigned to each family member in the same record. This means that you can search US, EP, as well as other related family members using the CPC. Most databases update their files on a weekly basis.

To remember when using CPC codes

- Databases may vary in the adoption of CPC code searchability. A searcher should verify the CPC coverage of the database.
- Electronic databases may include CPC codes not listed on a printed publication. A searcher should never merely rely on a printed document.
- No one database may provide 100% coverage. Multiple search tools are recommended for best results (especially on important patent searches).
- Up-to-date information concerning CPC codes is available on the USPTO and EPO websites.



How can I use CPC codes?

How can I find a relevant CPC code?

Assigned CPC codes are found on most printed patent documents, but it should be remembered that databases may have more up-to-date information. Free access to searchable databases are provided by the patent offices of most countries and regions (USPTO Search, Espacenet, etc.), along with search tools such as Google Patents, Free Patents Online, etc. Consult each resource to determine the countries it includes.

1. If you already have a patent document, look up that document in a database to see if any CPC codes have been assigned. If no CPC codes have been assigned, citation search the document or search another listed classification system to find other documents of similar technology classified with a CPC code.

For example, in Espacenet you may use that patent document number in a Smart Search and then click on the title of the document. In the Bibliographic Data you can click on the CPC codes and the definitions for those codes will appear allowing you to select codes of interest.

2. If you do not have a patent document, perform some text searching in a database to find a closely related patent document having an assigned CPC.

There is a 7-step process that uses both USPC and CPC class codes provided by the USPTO at the following: http://www.uspto.gov/products/library/ptd/services/7_Step_US_Patent_Search_Strategy_Guide_2014.pdf

Since there is not a direct one-to-one concordance yet available between USPC classifications and CPC classifications, use of a Statistical Mapping tool described in Step 6 of the guide may be helpful but it is advised to directly start with searching the CPC system (See point 3 hereunder).

3. You may also search the CPC system directly. In Espacenet click on "[Classification Search](#)" then type in key words. Various definitions and codes will appear. Click on the code to get subcategories with more detailed descriptions.

How can CPC codes be used in searching?

CPC codes can be used in many available search tools. The CPC codes may either be used alone to get an overview of all documents in that technology area or in combination with complimentary key words to refine the results.