

ANNEX V

IPC REVISION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

REVISION POLICY

1. The main goal of the revision of the IPC is to improve the IPC as an effective search tool for the retrieval of patent information contained in large international patent collections, and to improve its efficiency as a tool for investigating the state of the art in given fields of technology.
2. Other goals of the revision of the IPC is to improve the IPC as:
 - (a) an instrument for the orderly arrangement of patent documents in order to facilitate access to technological and legal information contained therein;
 - (b) a basis for selective dissemination of information to all users of patent information;
 - (c) a basis for the preparation of industrial property statistics which in turn would permit the assessment of technological development in various areas.
3. The data needed for serving the purposes referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2, above, are available from the Master Classification Database. This database contains the IPC data of patent documentation classified according to the latest edition of the IPC.
4. Revision of the IPC should be undertaken when needed in order to accommodate the IPC to the excessive file size and high rate of growth of the PCT minimum documentation classified in IPC groups, to accommodate new technologies, to change the classification structure in areas where it has become inefficient for searching or to increase the quality of the IPC by clarifying its text.
5. The possibility of meeting the search needs in a certain area of the IPC by another search technique, for example, specialized databases should be taken into consideration before commencing revision in that area.
6. Indexing schemes, associated with respective classification schemes, could be created, where desirable for efficient searching.

REVISION PROCEDURE

7. The revision procedure of the IPC is supported by the IPC management system, namely RIPCIS, which is used for introduction of amendments, preparation of proposals to be considered by IPC bodies, preparation of Technical Annexes of reports, on line consideration on the progress of revision and maintenance projects, and display of the “discussion”, “approved” and “adopted” views of the IPC.

8. IPC revision proposals could relate to one or more of the following categories:
 - (a) Subdivision of IPC groups having an excessive file size and a high rate of growth of the PCT minimum documentation;
 - (b) Change of the classification structure where it has become inefficient for searching;
 - (c) Clarification of wordings in order to improve consistency in classifying.
A revision of this type would not need any subsequent reclassification of patent documents.
9. For each group proposed to be subdivided, either the file should contain at least an average of 200 patent families of the PCT minimum documentation or the rate of growth of the PCT minimum documentation should be at least 50 patent families for the most recent year for which statistics are considered.
10. When proposing new groups, it should be expected that as an average 50-100 patent families from the PCT minimum documentation should be covered by each such new group.
11. The quantitative criteria indicated in paragraphs 9 and 10, above, should be applied in a flexible manner and the Committee of Experts (CE), when considering revision proposals, is authorized to depart from these criteria when this is justified by cost/benefit reasons.
12. Any revision proposal should be accompanied by a revision request explaining the reasons for the revision and indicating to which of the revision categories the proposal relates. The revision request should also contain the numerical data concerning the file size and rate of growth of the PCT minimum documentation for the Category-a proposals (see paragraph 8, above), citations of patent documents illustrating proposed new groups and information on the testing of the proposal. The revision request, including the revision proposal, should be submitted to the IPC electronic forum.
13. The preliminary testing of the proposed amendments to the IPC by an office-proponent should be a prerequisite for submitting a revision proposal. In respect of revision proposals which are concerned with the transfer of subject matter to new or existing classification places, the testing should include carrying out reclassification of at least 10% of the search file concerned.
14. If an office is not in a position to prepare a revision proposal but wishes to solve a classification problem in the IPC, it can submit only the revision request to the IPC electronic forum. Such a request should explain the reasons for its submission and indicate that the revision proposal cannot be elaborated by the office-proponent. The elaboration of the proposal will then be entrusted to an office-rapporteur if the revision request is accepted to the revision program.
15. The Common Hybrid Classification project was initiated by the Five IP Offices (EPO, JPO, KIPO, SIPO and USPTO) to eliminate unnecessary duplication of work, to improve international searching efficiency, to utilize the strengths of existing internal classification systems to enhance the IPC and to enhance patent examination efficiency and quality. The CE recognizes that the Common Hybrid Classification project will be the driving force behind the IPC revision in the years to come.

16. In view of the importance of the harmonization process of the internal classification systems of the Five IP Offices through the development of the IPC, any project resulting from the harmonization process of the internal classification systems of the Five IP Offices (including Trilateral Harmony projects) will be forwarded to the IB for automatic inclusion in the IPC revision program as having met the criteria set forth in paragraphs 9 through 13. The IB will immediately create an A (Trilateral) or F (Five IP Offices) project on the IPC electronic forum for consideration by the IPC Revision Working Group (WG). These projects will be treated with priority. Such projects will be considered during their IPC phase in order to check their compliance with IPC rules and to ensure the clarity and common international understanding of their content. Amendments to the submitted proposals that would require additional reclassification in respect to the original proposal should be considered only in exceptional cases, with good reasons and with the approval of the project originating office.

17. Additionally revision requests may be submitted by any other member or observer of the IPC Union. These requests should be evaluated by the CE to ensure that they comply with the revision policy and the revision criteria established by the CE and described in this document, determine the need for them and their priority. They should be submitted to the IPC e-forum at least three months before consideration for inclusion in the revision program by the CE. It should be noted that any new proposed scheme should take into account the local classification systems, in particular those of the Five IP Offices, in order to minimize the resources required for reclassification. Offices, in particular those having increased reclassification tasks, should comment on their ability to reclassify their documents for a proposed request prior to discussion at the CE.

18. Before accepting a revision request the availability of resources for reclassification of the PCT minimum documentation should be assured. If this is not the case and if, however, the project does satisfy the criteria, then the revision request will be put in abeyance until such resources become available.

19. Revision requests approved by the CE should be included in the IPC revision program. For each approved request, a project file should be created and an office-rapporteur should be appointed.

20. These projects are then forwarded to the IPC Revision Working Group (WG) for detailed consideration following a procedure described in document "Working Procedure of the IPC Revision Working Group".

21. Once consideration of a project is completed by the WG, it is forwarded to the CE for final adoption. This adoption may take place either electronically or during an ordinary session of the CE, depending on the date of publication. This adoption will also be the last opportunity for checking the new scheme before publication. The CE should decide which amendments should be included in the following edition of the IPC.

22. Every effort will be made to reclassify the relevant PCT minimum documentation before the date of entry into force of a revised scheme. If such complete reclassification cannot be achieved, the CE may decide, in particular in case of active technologies, to publish the relevant scheme in order to allow front file classification. However, no new revision should be undertaken in that area before completion of the reclassification.

[Annex VI follows]