

# United States District Court Southern District of Texas

## Electronic Access to Sealed and Restricted Documents in District CM/ECF

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### Overview

In District CM/ECF, attorneys for applicable parties may be given access to a sealed case, a sealed document in a case, a restricted case, or a restricted document. Access to view sealed or restricted cases or documents must be set by court staff on a per case or document basis. For a case or document where access has been provided, authorized users are granted access to view the sealed or restricted item by logging in to CM/ECF with the user's filing login and password, which authenticates the user.

The following instructions describe how to retrieve sealed or restricted documents

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### Accessing a Sealed Document through the NEF

Individuals who receive the email containing the Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF) are permitted one "free look" at the document by clicking on the associated hyperlinked document number embedded in the NEF. Pursuant to guidelines set by the Administrative Office of the U. S. Courts, the free look is available only once within the 15-day grace period from the date of filing.

STEP	ACTION
1	Click the document number hyperlink in the email. The <b>CM/ECF Filer or PACER Login</b> page displays.
2	Enter the attorney's <b>CM/ECF Filer</b> login and password ( <b>not</b> the PACER login and password). <b>Note:</b> The <b>CM/ECF Filer</b> login and password is used to authenticate the user accessing the sealed document.
3	Check the redaction rules check box.
4	Click <b>Login</b> . The page displays the message, "Warning! This document is restricted to court users and the applicable party." and a <b>View Document</b> button. <b>Note:</b> If you are presented with the <i>blue</i> <b>PACER Login</b> page, then your free look may have already been used or expired. You will have to also enter your PACER login and password, and regular PACER fees will apply.
5	Click <b>View Document</b> . <b>Note:</b> If you are presented with a page stating, "This document is not available." instead of the warning page containing the <b>View Document</b> button, then you may have entered the wrong login and password, or you may not have sealed access to this document.
6	When the document is displayed, save it locally to a location you have designated.

If you fail to retrieve the sealed document through the NEF email “free look,” then subsequent retrieval of the document from CM/ECF must be made through CM/ECF and your PACER account and is subject to regular PACER fees.

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## Accessing a Sealed Document through District CM/ECF

If a user’s “free look” has been used or has expired, a sealed document can be accessed through CM/ECF using the following procedures must be used to retrieve the document.

STEP	ACTION
1	Go to <a href="#">Live District CM/ECF</a> .
2	Click the <a href="#">SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS – Document Filing System</a> link. The <b>CM/ECF Filer or PACER Login</b> page displays.
3	Enter the attorney’s <b>CM/ECF Filer</b> login and password ( <b>not</b> the PACER login and password). <b>Note:</b> The <b>CM/ECF Filer</b> login and password is used to authenticate the user accessing the sealed document. Authentication of the user must be completed before logging into PACER for the user to view the sealed document.
4	Check the redaction rules check box.
5	Click <b>Login</b> . If a valid CM/ECF login and password combination was entered, then the system displays its main filing web page.
6	Select <b>Query</b> from the blue menu bar. The <b>PACER Login</b> page displays.
7	Enter your PACER login and password.
8	Click <b>Login</b> . If a valid PACER login and password combination was entered, then CM/ECF displays the <b>Query</b> page.
9	Enter the case number in the <b>Case Number</b> field, and click <b>Find This Case</b> .
10	Click <b>Run Query</b> . The screen will display the case number, case style, and additional case information.
11	Click <b>Docket Report....</b>
12	On the Docket Sheet options page, select the options you want, then click <b>Run Report</b> .
13	On the docket sheet, locate the document you need, and click the document number link associated with it. The page displays the message, “Warning! This document is restricted to court users and the applicable party.” and a <b>View Document</b> button.

STEP	ACTION
14	Click <b>View Document</b> . <b>Note:</b> If you are presented with a page stating, “This document is not available.” instead of the warning page containing the <b>View Document</b> button, then you may have entered the wrong login and password, or you may not have sealed access to this document.
15	When the document is displayed, save it locally to a location you have designated.

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## Troubleshooting

For questions regarding issues retrieving documents, you can contact our CM/ECF Help Desk at [district\\_ecf\\_helpdesk@txs.uscourts.gov](mailto:district_ecf_helpdesk@txs.uscourts.gov) or by phone at (713) 250-5500. Our support hours are Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CST. When sending email, please include the case number and document number.

For more information on how to use CM/ECF, see the [CM/ECF Attorney's User Guide](#).