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**Title of Program:**

Nebraska State Agency Proposed Rules and Regulations Tracking and Email Notification System

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**Description of Program:**

The Office of the Secretary of State for the State of Nebraska has brought the legal process of creating, amending, and repealing regulations into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with their Rules and Regulations Online Application. In a process where months, even years can go by before a proposed regulation completes the process of adoption, following up on every proposal manually could be challenging. Now, the three agency administrators involved in the regulation adoption process have a tool that will accomplish this for them.

**General Subject Area:**

Business Services

## **II. Executive Summary:**

Live URL Tracking: <http://www.sos.ne.gov/rules-and-regs/regsearch/index.html>

Live URL email notification: <http://www.sos.state.ne.us/rules-and-regs/regtrack/notify/index.cgi>

Test URL tracking: <http://ne-test.cdc.nicusa.com/SOS-docs/rules-and-regs/regsearch/Rules/index.cgi>

Test URL email notification: <http://ne-test.cdc.nicusa.com/SOS-docs/rules-and-regs/regtrack/index.cgi>

[For a test username and password, please contact Jennifer Rasmussen at 402-471-7870 or by email at jasmussen@egov.com](mailto:jasmussen@egov.com)

### **History**

The Office of the Secretary of State for the State of Nebraska has brought the legal process of creating, amending, and repealing regulations into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the launch of the online service for proposed rules and regulations tracking and email notification system. The service was launched on January 24, 2007.

A regulation is created, amended, or repealed through the hearing and adoption process. The purpose of the hearing and adoption process is to ensure that the regulation is properly authorized by law, and that the public has an opportunity to participate in the rulemaking process.

This process can take anywhere from weeks to years from start to finish, and involves the participation of multiple State agencies.

Prior to the development of the online tracking system, there was no easy way for citizens to know what new rules were being proposed except for a brief 30 day posting in the local newspaper, or by contacting an agency directly to inquire. Nor, once aware of a new regulation being considered was there an easy method of finding out at what point in the process it was, when hearing dates were scheduled, or how they could have their voice heard on a topic.

The Proposed Rules and Regulations Docket, created through a joint effort by the Secretary of State's office, the Governor's Policy Research Office, and the Attorney General's office, offers a ground-breaking method for citizens to access the information they need all in one place, and for agencies in turn to be able to use the technology to receive public feedback.

The pioneering concept for this Web service combined a password protected interface for each agency involved in the adoption process, a password protected archive for proposals no longer on the docket, a public interface with an online comments submission feature, and an email notification registration system, for users to create their own customized docket and track only the regulations they wish. "Nebraska feels that inter-agency cooperation is of utmost importance when serving the citizen. Our regulations tracking system is a wonderful example of what can come from agencies working together with a common goal of enhancing government accessibility." --Nebraska Secretary of State, John Gale.

### **Significance**

The main component of the Rules and Regulation Tracking System is a publicly accessible docket that lists all of the current proposals, and the level of their progress through the mandatory adoption process.

Proposed regulations are organized in to an easily readable chart format. Even at a screen resolution of 800 x 600 the user can still view the entire docket left to right with minimal scrolling. The docket may be printed in its chart format or downloaded to Excel as a spreadsheet. All proposed rules are kept to one line, alphabetized and separated by agency, and then organized in ascending numerical order by the Title, Chapter(s), and Section(s) which identify the new or amended regulation. This makes searching a particular proposal easy for the user, who can then access a wide array of information from one listing.

The agency promulgating the rule begins the listing, along with a short description, and a field for every step in the regulation process, which is populated by designated agency administrators as the regulation advances. This means that, at a glance, a user can see if a hearing date is coming up, or has passed,

and which State agency involved in the approval process currently has the rule for review. If the adoption process has been terminated for any reason, the agency where the termination occurred will also list the reason in its field.

Each listing on the docket also contains a link to a detail screen for agency information, hearing information with corresponding accessibility provisions contact information, and a further link to the full text of the proposed regulation. This detail screen includes, as well, the functionality that allows a user to submit a comment to the proposing agency within the comment period prior to the hearing date. Public hearing notice/comment period can be as little as 30 days and prior to the creation of the online docket, the only way a citizen could present their feedback to an agency was to send a letter, or physically attend a hearing.

Agency administrators from the office of the Secretary of State, the office of the Attorney General, and the Governor's Policy Research office access the administrative functions of the docket via a link on the public docket. Their ability to populate information on the docket is defined through their user name and password, therefore the Secretary of State administrator has access to all fields, while the Attorney General administrator only has the ability to enter dates and comments in the "Attorney General's office received" and the "Attorney General's office approved" columns, and the Governor's Policy Research office administrator can only enter dates and comments in the "Governor's Policy Research office received" and the "Date Governor Approved" columns. In this way the integrity of the process is preserved.

Most of the functionality of the application resides with the Agency Administrator docket. Linking from the bottom of the public docket, the SOS administrator enters new listings by clicking on "Add a New Regulation", or edits listings by selecting "Edit" above Title/Chapter /Section number. Administrative functionality includes:

- Add Title/Chapter/Section numbers singly or in groups. Current Titles are available in a drop down selection box, or new ones can be added.
- Agency information is auto-populated based on the Title selection, but may be edited if necessary.
- Accessibility Provision information can also be auto-populated if they are the same as the agency information.
- Upload Word or PDF documentation of the proposal submitted by the agency.
- Input demographics on multiple hearing dates.
- Enable online commenting.
- Remove a regulation listing completely.
- "Secretary of State Received Hearing Notice" column is auto-populated with the date the regulation is entered, but may be edited if necessary.

When submitted, a new listing appears immediately on the docket (or if an edit, the revised version replaces what was there before) and an email notification goes out to all users subscribed to track that agency's regulations.

The other two agency administrators have access to a more streamlined screen with functionality that fits their needs.

- Month, day, and year boxes for Received/Approved dates.
- Drop down selection list of most common comments entered for regulations, or a blank text field for flexibility in adding comments.

Email notifications are also instantly sent when any new entries or changes are made to these columns.

Once a regulation has successfully completed the approval process and an effective date has been entered, the listing will be visible for 30 days from that date. After 30 days, the listing is automatically transferred to an Archive docket that is accessible by agency administrators only, so no information is lost, but the public docket remains clear of old rules and maintains a streamlined format. If citizens wish

to view effective regulations they may do so via the Nebraska Administrative Code search application, which is also available through the Secretary of State's Web site, and has the same look and feel as the Regulations tracking application.

A final, collaborative piece of functionality is the email notification system. Users access the registration for this system through a link on the public docket. All they need enter is an email address and create a password. The user then sets up a personalized docket to track any or all agencies' regulations. When changes are made to any of the agencies' regulations being tracked, or if a new regulation is added to the public docket, the registrant then receives an email notifying them of the change. If the user is being notified of a new proposal, all the demographic information for a hearing is included in the email they receive. Email addresses are stored purely for notification, and are not used by the agencies for any other purpose.

All parts of the application have been designed to be, and are Section 508 compliant.

### **Impacts/Results**

The creation of this cross-agency application has provided for governmental economy through operational time savings in many different areas.

In the old paper process, keeping track of what office has the current document and what stages of the approval processes were still pending, could be challenging. Now, the three agency administrators involved in the regulation adoption process have a tool that will accomplish this for them.

The online docket has given the three State offices the further ability to all view the same information, concurrently, in the same place. This saves on administrative time in each office as information related to a regulation's progress only has to be recorded one time, by one office, instead of being tracked and recorded in each office individually. It also has afforded everyone a better understanding of the entire review process, not just the piece of it for which they are responsible.

Other advantages of using an automated system to record the adoption process include: drop down menus with fixed information can save agency administrators time, and reduce data entry errors; and since the docket is exportable, reports can be created on current proposed rules and/or from the archive. Ultimately, the online docket could eliminate the need for the current paper entries, which would save on personnel time, and reduce the need for paper files and storage space.

The email notification feature is also a tool that allows for agency administrators to know in advance what regulations will be arriving for review, and to have a chance to prepare, which helps to move the process along even more efficiently.

Even the State agencies proposing regulations, and regulation changes, save in operational efficiency by fielding fewer citizen calls requesting information relating to the status of a rule. Where an agency representative before, may have had to spend considerable time researching where the regulation was in the adoption process in order to respond to an inquiry, now that person, or the citizen themselves can use the online tracking application as a reliable resource. Information on the status of a regulation is available now in real time.

The Rules and Regulations tracking system was developed under the self-funded model. There is no projected or actual development cost. Nebraska Interactive, LLC, provided development work for the application.

Nebraska Interactive is the official eGovernment solutions provider for the State of Nebraska. The company builds and manages interactive government services on behalf of the State and is a wholly owned subsidiary of eGovernment firm NIC.