

# Media Alert

Colorado Judicial Branch

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## **Accessing public criminal justice records on-line:**

### **Outline of resource information**

A variety of public criminal justice records have been made available for on-line access within the last two years. The following is intended to be a guide to where to go for public criminal justice records, the specific types of information available, background on each data source, and scope of data available. There are currently two original sources, one starting with the Colorado Judicial Branch which contains court records, and the second from the State of Colorado through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which contains arrest records of individuals who are fingerprinted.

### **A brief history of on-line court records in Colorado**

On Nov. 17, 2000, Colorado became one of the first states in the country to allow public access to its court's information database. A contract was awarded to Boulder-based e-InfoData.com, Inc to create a public-access web site interface to the data in the Colorado Judicial Branch's Integrated Colorado On-line Network (ICON). Through this, court record searches on individuals can be conducted at [CoCourts.com](http://CoCourts.com). An individual's public court records can be accessed by submitting their last name and either the full first name or part thereof. Searches can be further narrowed by including the date of birth, and/or case number.

Last month, the State of Colorado took another important step in providing Colorado's businesses and citizens convenient access to public records through [CBIRecordsCheck.com](http://CBIRecordsCheck.com), a web service that provides access to the CBI arrest database.

The following details the information available from the two databases:

#### CoCourts.com:

- includes over 8.5 million cases involving more than 14 million parties, going back as much as 30 years
- the system is updated in real-time
- contains all cases filed in the courts, including non-fingerprinted criminal and traffic cases
- an individual's public court records can be accessed by submitting a last name and either the full first name or part thereof
- contains complete information on court dispositions

- information related to a variety of other aspects of a case is also available, including, but not limited to: scheduled court events, fines, bond information, etc.
- on a typical day, the database is updated by court clerks more than 100,000 times
- if a case is still open, the current status of the case is available
- users are not charged for search modifications or viewing all of the records returned in a search
- information discovered in the database must be checked against actual court records before it can be used for denial of employment, users can order paper copies of case information directly from the courts using the website
- search results are instantaneous
- searches are password protected to ensure the web site user's privacy
- the maximum fee for each search is \$5 (quantity discounts are offered to entities that conduct large numbers of searches) and secure payment is available with major credit cards
- over 1.4 million searches have been performed over the last 18 months
- more than 20,000 people and companies have performed searches

#### CBIREcordsCheck.com

- contains information on people who are arrested AND fingerprinted. (An estimated 60 percent of the people arrested are fingerprinted and entered in the CBI database. For example, not included are most misdemeanors and traffic cases, nor those felonies in which the defendants are not fingerprinted. This is particularly true for cases prior to 1998).
- database provides arrest information but not necessarily what a person was finally charged with or whether there was a conviction – a person is not a criminal until convicted of a crime
- searches require subject's full name and birth date
- the target posting time for getting arrest records into the system is 48 hours
- approximately 10 percent of court dispositions prior to 1998 exist in database
- search results are instantaneous
- anyone using the presence of an arrest record in the CBI database as a basis for denying employment without checking the actual disposition of the case may be in violation of the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act as well as state statutes. They may also incur civil liability.
- an extra charge is assessed if a search is modified or if all records returned in a search are accessed
- searches are \$5.50 payable via on-line credit card

Anyone using the CBI arrest database, and not also using CoCourts.com, should be aware that they will not receive as complete and current picture of an individual's total criminal history—including all non-fingerprinted cases and their current dispositions and status, as would be available by using both databases.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact us.

*This information is provided as an e-mail service of the Colorado State Judicial Branch, Office of State Court Administrator, 1301 Pennsylvania Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colo. 80203. To discontinue this service or update your e-mail address, please respond to this message with your name, contact information and any comments.*