

News

[Columbine](#)
[JonBenet](#)
[Election 2000](#)
[Homeless murders](#)
[Legislature](#)
[Nation](#)
[World](#)
[Sci/Tech](#)
[Religion](#)
[Columnists](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Denver Square](#)
[Births](#)
[Weddings](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Weather](#)
[Lottery](#)

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Sports

Recreation

Going Out

Staying In

Autos

Careers

Homes

Classifieds

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District courts begin electronic filings

Civil, domestic cases are first in program; expansion expected

By **M.E. Sprengelmeyer**

Denver Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

At 12:02 a.m. on July 31, family law lawyer Russel Murray III clicked a button on his computer and sent filings in a divorce case to an Arapahoe County court.

It was the first electronic court filing in a program that will soon make Colorado the first state in the country with statewide e-filing for district courts.

On Monday, the program expanded to include district courts in Douglas, Elbert and Lincoln counties. By January, all the state's district courts, plus the Denver Probate Court, will be accepting court filings online through JusticeLink.

The service allows lawyers who subscribe to file legal papers through a secured e-mail link, making bulky print-outs and costly couriers obsolete. So far, it's available only to civil and domestic cases, but backers say it's a sign of things to come, Murray said.

"It's a solid step forward in the development of the concept commonly referred to as the paperless office," Murray said. "The advance of technology in the law is truly revolutionizing it, as it is so many things. The conservatism that has previously been associated with lawyers is fading and they're becoming interested."

So far, the program has worked without a hitch, although only a handful of lawyers have taken

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advantage, said Steve Loftis, program coordinator for the state court administrator's office.

Traditionally, lawyers wanting to file legal briefs have had to print them up, send a courier to rush them to the courthouse, then notify opposing counsel by mail. The new system cuts out the middlemen and lets a lawyer make the filing and notification electronically.

The fee is 10 cents per page, with a \$2 minimum charge.

The public and media will not be allowed to access the court documents online, but hard copies will be placed in the usual court files, Loftis said. Future projects will be designed to increase public access to various court records online, he said.

Arapahoe County was chosen to kick off the program because of its own electronic filing experiments in recent years. When the statewide system was planned, "the attorneys were certainly impressed and thought it would be advantageous to do it," Loftis said. "Now it's a matter of doing it, breaking the habit of doing things in the paper world."

August 17, 2000

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