



# Patent Classification Through the Ages

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Forms of classification for scientific reasons have been around from at least the Fourth Century BC when Aristotle used a system to classify organisms. Using a classification system for patents has been in practice since shortly after the US patent system originated. At first, it was used to place the models and applications in groups based on general topics, thus allowing examiners and staff to efficiently search.

By 1830, the US established 16 broad classification categories. In 1836, the New Patent Act included the first statutory mention of a patent classification system. It directed the Commissioner of Patents to "cause to be classified and arranged..." the models and applications. By 1878, the number of classes grew to 158.

In the 19th century, other countries also developed patent classification systems. The German Patent Office put a class on their patents as early as 1877. By 1880, the UK had their own classification system.

In 1900, Examiner Skinner was instructed to publish the "Plan of Classification of Patented Inventions." This became the basis for the United States Patent Classification (USPC) system from that point forward. The plan specified that "articles of manufacture will be grouped according to their function or use... not to select a specific or limited function as the basis of classification where the articles are capable of a broader use." The US thus moved to grouping according to function or use. Before that, the groupings were based on broad categories such as agriculture, boating, and other categories.

In the 1960's, the use of more advanced technology drove classification. The US developed the Manual-Access Patent Information Techniques (MAPIT) system. By 1970, the Europeans developed and implemented the European Classification (ECLA) system. By 1971, the International Patent Classification (IPC) became a world-wide system

under the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) when the Strasbourg agreement was adopted.

This allowed classification to expand and develop into a comprehensive system, making searching and finding documents less cumbersome. By 1977, Japan developed online searching capabilities. In 1985, ECLA introduced a system that incorporated online searching and during that same year, Japan went to a paperless office.

After these advancement leaps, the world had to catch up with Japan and Europe. A new era of patent classification started in 2006 when WIPO announced major IPC reforms.

The US became a major part of the worldwide effort, when in 2010, **USPTO Director David Kappos (US)** and President Benoit Battistelli (EPO) signed an agreement to form the **Cooperative Patent Classification** (CPC) system based on ECLA and IPC. In January 2013, CPC was launched.

The US commitment to international classification and creating a cooperative atmosphere has continued since CPC launched. This includes the creation of the Office of International Patent Cooperation (DCIPC) in 2014, which in turn, developed classification divisions that hired numerous patent classifiers and other management experts to help improve and expand CPC and IPC to make them exemplary for worldwide use.

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# Patent CLASSIFICATION TIMELINE

Patent Office show that about seven thousand and five hundred different US had sixteen broad things become classification subjects of categories. Patent applications for The New Patent Act classification was patents. These more than a method included the first Patent Classification seventy-five hundred statutory mention of a Patents reported. "The Division issued its first of organizing a different subjects, DPK symbols were revision to Class 20 collection; it was, and patent classification new classification is according to their continues to be, used nearly completed, and Wooden Buildings, analogies, are thrown US New Classification United Kingdom Commissioner of to determine which will shortly be printed. into one hundred and Germany and were this was the first time The number of classes forty-five classes." US starts using and examiner will review Patents to "cause to printed on documents published January 1, Patent Office created a USPC class featured be classified and at the European developing a multiple hierarchical Congress enacted Commissioner a classification Patent Office. classification System. the first Patent act. arranged... classes. subdivisions. application. Leggett, 2/23/1873. 1790 1830 1836 1867 1872 1878 1880 1898 1899 1877 1900 1930-1932 1954 1966 1968 1970s 1971 1975 1977 Skinner's Plan of 1960 First US classification Council of Europe US New Guide to the First edition of the Strasbourg The conversion from Strasbourg agreement Start of online Classification of found with class decides to set up a International Patent search at the creation and use of the old searching in force (October 7). European Patent Patented Inventions indicated on the European the classification Classification (IPC) Japanese Patent Classification went published, "articles of classification for Office. issued patent. system published. enacted. completed and all IPC becomes a from 89 to 124 manufacture will be Patents for Inventors. Manual-Access FPO decided to European documents world-wide system grouped according to **Furonean Convention** convert its search were classified via FC under the supervision their function or use... documentation to a of World Intellectual on the International codes according to techniaues not to select a specific Classification of (MAPIT) system based on ECLA only which was Property Office or limited function as Patents for Inventors. based on the the basis of International Paten classification where the Classification (IPC) articles are capable of a

broader use."

IPC officially introduced at IPO • ECLA: ICO symbols introduced.

1985

 JPO: "paperless computerized search system.

## 2006

2010

IPC Reform starts

Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO, Mr David Kappos, and the President of the FPO Mr Renoît Battistelli, issued a joint statement that both Offices would "work toward the formation of a partnership to explore the development of a joint classification system based on the Furonean Classification system (ECLA) that will incorporate the best classification practices of the two offices.

Under Secretary of Commerce for

## 2012

CPC scheme made public for the first time

## January:

2013

• EPO and USPTO launch Cooperative Patent Classification System.

• US Patent Classification system was discontinued. All documents classified in CPC only.

2018

CPC is expanding

around the world

First US patent grant published with CPC symbols.

- The EPO and SIPO sign agreement for SIPO to begin classifying its newly published patent applications into
- The USPTO and KIPO sign an Agreement to start a pilot to classify into the CPC.

## August:

All CPC Definitions become available on the internet.

The EPO and ROSPATENT sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to classify into the CPC December: The EPO and INPI Brazil sign a Memorandum

of Understanding (MoU) to classify into the CPC



