

Global Protection Systems and Services

Pursuing PCT Automation

The extraordinary growth in the automation of applications and examinations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) has prompted WIPO member States to approve further automation of the PCT system. At the March 1998 General Assemblies meeting, about 40 million Swiss francs was approved to finance the project, which will not only speed registration activities, but also facilitate communications with PCT users, minimize staff growth, and improve storage capacities.

The project, which will take three to four years to complete, will include:

- developing an electronic document management system for handling the increasing number of international applications, whether in electronic or paper form;



Automated processing of applications under the PCT.

- improving "PCT-EASY" (Electronic Application SYstem), which enables applicants to file international applications electronically. Improvements will allow receiving Offices to receive international applications more easily and accurately, perform automated formality checks, and transmit international applications to the International Bureau of WIPO and the International Searching Authorities;
- establishing electronic communication between the PCT Offices and the International Bureau of WIPO of documents, notifications, and information to enable transfer of copies of international applications, priority documents, international search and preliminary examination reports;
- developing, as necessary, new standards for electronic filing, coding, and transmission of data to ensure full compatibility of the International Bureau's system with those in national and regional Offices.

In October 1998, WIPO will begin the project by issuing an international tender for the automation of the receipt, processing, and publishing of international applications at the International Bureau. This tender process is expected to be completed by March 1999, with work beginning by April 1999.

Once completed, the new advanced PCT system will provide the following benefits:

- Applicants will be able to file international applications electronically, checking their data for errors, while paying lower fees. Fee reduction is expected because automation will be less labor intensive, require less space, and lower publication costs.
- Receiving Offices will be able to process incoming international applications electronically, including automatic formality checks, and then transmit those applications and other documents to the International Bureau of WIPO and International Searching Authorities.
- The International Bureau of WIPO will be able to electronically process international applications, including their publication, provide international search and preliminary examination reports, and automatically communicate information and documents necessary to designated and elected Offices in electronic or paper form.
- Offices of or acting for the PCT Contracting States will be able to cope more easily and economically with workloads resulting from increased applications and receive, for the national phase, only the information they need when it is needed.
- The general public will have access to PCT information in electronic form and their ability to search information will be further enhanced. ■