Public Safety Codes of the World: Stand Up For Safety!

by Carl Malamud, Public.Resource.Org

Funding Unsuccessful This project's funding goal was not reached on October 28.

We're converting 28,040 public safety standards into valid HTML files to make them freely accessible and much more usable.

Public Safety Matters

Hi. My name is Carl Malamud and I run Public.Resource.Org, a nonprofit that helps make important government information available to you. In the past, we've posted over 6,000 government videos through our FedFlix program and were responsible for putting the historical opinions of the U.S. Court of Appeals on the Internet for the first time.

Our most recent project is to publish the world's public safety codes.

In the last two years, we've posted 28,040 public safety codes from around the world. We post all these documents on law.resource.org and make them available on the Internet Archive.

These codes—building, fire, electric, plumbing, HazMat, elevators and much more—are mandated by law and regulate every aspect of our lives.

But citizens have not been able to access these codes without paying hundreds of dollars. That's right! Hundreds of dollars to research that oil spill or find out if your factory is operating safely. Hundreds of dollars to find out if your baby stroller meets the latest safety standards mandated by law.

That's wrong, and we're changing that. (Read why this is wrong in my essay "Twelve Tables of Law.")

But we want to do more, and to do more we need your help.

"Welcome to Code City" is an Ignite Talk about codes and law. Click to watch that video.

This Kickstarter: Rekeying Public Safety Codes To Make Them Accessible

We've spent a fortune buying paper copies of public safety codes, but low-quality scans just aren't good enough. We're asking your help so that we can rekey the codes into valid HTML. We carefully key in the text of each code, comparing two independent keyed versions for accuracy, then setting that all into valid HTML.

What this means is all these codes become available in a standard format that works with today's search engines, on mobile platforms, and are significantly more accessible and usable than the scans.

If we reach our funding goal, we'll be able to continue our project to key in many of the 28,040 public safety codes we've posted that are incorporated into law. We'll also go the next step, which is to redraw the graphics into SVG and recode all the formulas into Math Markup Language. This makes these vital public safety specifications much more accessible and more usable.
3 Examples of What We're Doing

We've been doing this for several years, and there are many examples of our work on-line at law.resource.org. Here's 3 examples:

- Here's the pdf version of the 1990 ANSI standard for safety of metal ladders, which is mandated by OSHA. Here's the version after it has been rekeyed.
- Here's India's standard for sampling water and wastewater in pdf format and then rekeyed into html.
- Here's the UK standard for access to buildings by the disabled in pdf format and rekeyed into html.

We remove the red tape from legal materials so you can know the law.

Your Help Matters

Your support is what makes our work possible.

We're set a floor of $100,000 on this campaign, because that's the minimum we need to operate at scale. But, we can put to good use $1.2 million and if we get more, we can do some serious work on diagrams, formulas, metadata, indices, and other improvements. That's a lot of money, but our work covers the globe. In particular, our focus in 2014 is on making all 18,592 public safety standards for India available, accessible, and usable.

If you support this project, we'll add your name to the wall of support at YesWeScan.Org. We appreciate your financial contribution, but also important is to show the world that the Internet supports public safety and cares about the law.

When you contribute at the next level, we will happily acknowledge your contribution on a standard, much as NPR does on their radio programs. "Support for the HTML conversion of [name of standard here] was made possible by a generous contribution from [your name here]." We want to show the world that people care about public safety.

For higher contribution levels, we're happy to send you pamphlets or "Codes of the World," a new coffee table book based on our radical public printing factory. Check out the Codes of the World photoset on Flickr and read what Cory Doctorow had to say about the Big Box of Standards he received.

Public safety codes are made by dedicated volunteers from all over the world. They want you to read these documents instead of locking them up in a vault.

Our Revolutionary Pamphlets

My pamphlets are all based on speeches I've given. Many of them are heavily researched and footnoted. If you get a reward with a pamphlet, it will come signed by me and rubber-stamped with a revolutionary saying such as "Code is Law." If you want a specific pamphlet, happy to accommodate.
By The People was a speech about why the primary legal of materials should not be locked in a closet. It was given at O'Reilly’s Gov 2.0 Summit.

Rules For Radicals was a keynote at the WWW Conference.

Twelve Tables of American Law was a speech at the Harvard Law School about the history of Roman Law and promulgation.

Currents of Our Time was a speech at O'Reilly’s Gov 2.0 Summit about why procurement and IT are so broken.

Three Revolutions in American Law was a speech given in Oregon and talks about the early history of promulgation of law in America.

To Bear Knowledge was a speech to try and motivate the Digital Public Library of America to think about more than books.

Crime and Access to Knowledge was a memorial address and an essay about my friend and colleague, Aaron Swartz.

This Law is Your Law! Stand Up For Safety

The workflow that we use to make standards available on the Internet is well-established, and we've been doing this for several years. We've already converted 8,068 graphics files into SVG and MathML. We have over 1,538 standards rekeyed already into HTML. We're confident we can continue to scale this process up.

When there are obstacles, particularly technical ones, we keep at it. It took close to a decade to get the U.S. Patent database on the net. We've been working on building codes since 2007. The quest to put Congressional video online spans 15 years. Many of the databases we work on, such as the 7 million nonprofit tax returns we host, have required considerable struggle over several years to get the data on the net. We may not always win, but you can bet we'll keep on trying.

The biggest challenge we do face is that some of the code people think it is OK for the law...
to cost lots of money because they're the ones that get your money. Some of these non-profit organizations pay million-dollar salaries to their execs and they want to be the only ones that are allowed to post copies of the laws. But, some of the best lawyers in the world, including our friends at the Electronic Frontier Foundation and a half-dozen top law firms have volunteered their efforts pro bono to support our work to make the law available.

Not everybody in the standards world has problems with this, and in some countries (including the United States!), we've got top-level governmental support. Still, fighting for your right to read the law is the biggest challenge we face. When these challenges arise, our strategy to tackle them is we work harder and so far that's been working.

FAQ

➤ Why not just use OCR? Why rekey the data?

➤ Wasn't this stuff all born digital? Why are you rekeying the data instead of just getting the source code from the creators?

➤ Are you a non-profit?

➤ Is your data available in bulk?

➤ Do FAQs like this ever serve any broader purpose? What's with this PACER caper?

➤ Is that the first time you've used this device? What was The Telephone Company hack?

Ask a question

Report this project to Kickstarter