

How eCop™ Helps Law Firms Comply with Client Billing Rules

Automating the process with eCop helps law firms avoid rejected bills, save time, minimize labor costs and accelerate their cash flow

The Problem

Manually reviewing every pre-bill for compliance with each client's set of detailed, and ever-changing, billing rules is a time-consuming, manpower-intensive undertaking for all law firms. When rule violations are not caught and corrected during the pre-bill review process, it results in rejected bills, more time and effort required to review, correct and appeal each rejected bill and a further delay in collection of the bill.

The Solution: the eCop Rules Engine

The "driving force" of eCop is "under the hood". eCop's Rules Engine is an integrated repository for every client's specific billing requirements. User-defined RuleSets contain all the critical billing rules for each client. RuleSets can contain one or more specific rules for such client billing requirements as:

authorized timekeepers	incorrect task codes
block billing	prohibited administrative tasks
incorrect wording or phrases	disallowed photo copies or travel expenses
prohibited punctuation	pre-approval requirements

The integrated Rules Engine then automatically compares each client's RuleSet to every unbilled time and cost entry for that client within Omega's system. Violations of any client rule are then automatically flagged by eCop for correction.

Tip: To save time entering commonly-used billing rules for each client, some law firms create a "standard" RuleSet of universal client rules that they can assign to virtually every client. They then create and add a specific RuleSet of unique rules for each client.

The End of "Cheat Sheets"

With eCop's Rules Engine, there's less of a need for spreadsheets, "cheat sheets", file folders or 3-ring binders to keep track of all the various billing rules for every client.

"Some client's set of billing requirements can run up to 30 pages long," says Carmen Webb, the Billing Supervisor for Cooper & Scully in Dallas, TX. "I have to try to condense them to a more manageable size. But even then, some of these condensed 'short cut' versions would still be 10 pages long."

Catching Violations

eCop offers multiple opportunities within the time entry/billing process to catch client billing rule violations. This saves valuable time and labor during the billing process by eliminating the need for someone to personally review and compare all pre-bills for compliance with every client's specific billing rules.

Before implementing eCop, these firms all experienced similar frustrations:

"It used to take hours for us to look for potential client billing rule violations in just one attorney's drafts," says Debby Johnson, Billing Coordinator for Jones, Skelton & Hochuli in Phoenix, AZ. "Missing a single semicolon in a bill during the review process could get the entire bill automatically rejected upon submission."

"We spent hours and hours each month combing every pre-bill for possible client billing rule violations," says Janet Dotson, Firm Administrator for Duplass, Zwain, Bourgeois, Pfister & Weinstock in Metairie, LA. "Looking for prohibited administrative tasks, unapproved timekeepers and even words like 'motion' or 'database' became time consuming and tedious. It sometimes made you want to pull your hair out."

"The billing process, before eCop, was unnecessarily lengthened because it took so much time for our billers to 'flip pages' comparing each individual bill against that client's billing guidelines," adds Carmen Webb. "I was becoming an expert at 'skimming' a pre-bill for tiny errors like semicolons."

"Even though we spent literally days and days every month reviewing and editing WIP for compliance with clients' billing rules, we still had a higher rejection rate than we'd like on our ebills," says Francine Doran-Wrycza, Billing Supervisor for Foley & Mansfield in Minneapolis, MN. "And, for every bill that gets rejected, it takes another two weeks to create and submit the appeal and then an additional 60 days to finally receive payment."

Real Time Validation

With the "real time validation" option enabled on a timekeeper's desktop, eCop will identify any billing rule errors immediately upon an attempt by the user to save a new time or cost entry into the Omega Legal system. When an error for that client's RuleSet is identified by eCop, a dialog box automatically pops up on the user's desktop to alert the user of the specific rule violation. The user can then correct the error before saving the completed time or cost entry.

eCop users quoted in this article:

Francine Doran-Wrycza

Billing Supervisor
Foley & Mansfield
Minneapolis, MN
220 Timekeepers
www.FoleyMansfield.com

Janet Dotson

Firm Administrator
Duplass, Zwain, Bourgeois,
Pfister & Weinstock
Metairie, LA
35 Timekeepers
www.Duplass.com

Sheresa Galbreath

Bookkeeper
Omega Legal Systems
Phoenix, AZ
www.OmegaLegal.com

Debby Johnson

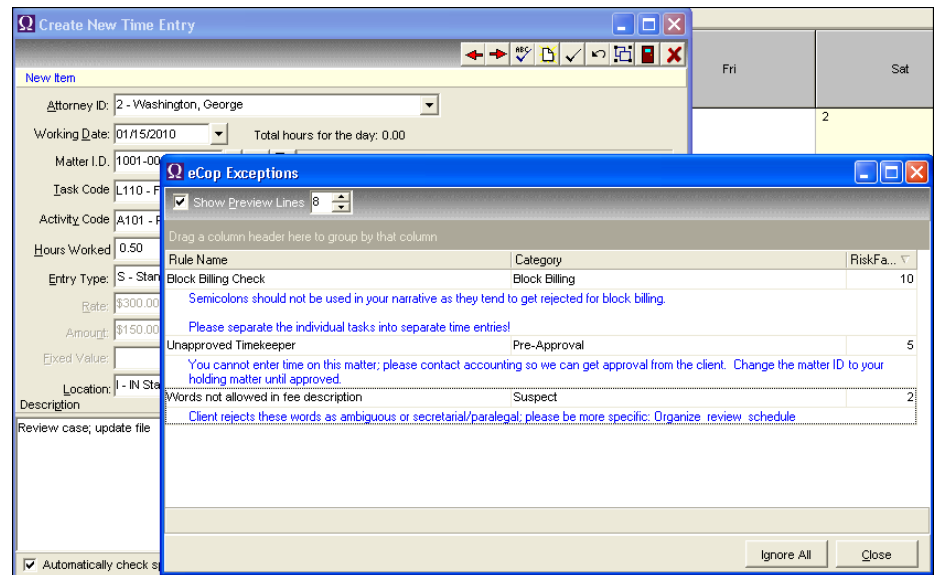
Billing Coordinator
Jones, Skelton & Hochuli
Phoenix, AZ
110 Timekeepers
www.JSHfirm.com

Carmen Webb

Billing Supervisor
Cooper & Scully
Dallas, TX
100 Timekeepers
www.CooperScully.com

Tip: Law firms are using eCop's ability to add user-defined comments within the pop-up dialog box to instruct timekeepers on how to fix a specific rule violation.

"With eCop's real time validation, it moves the responsibility for rules compliance from our department to the timekeeper. That improves our overall compliance and saves us a lot of time during the pre-bill review process," reports Janet Dotson.

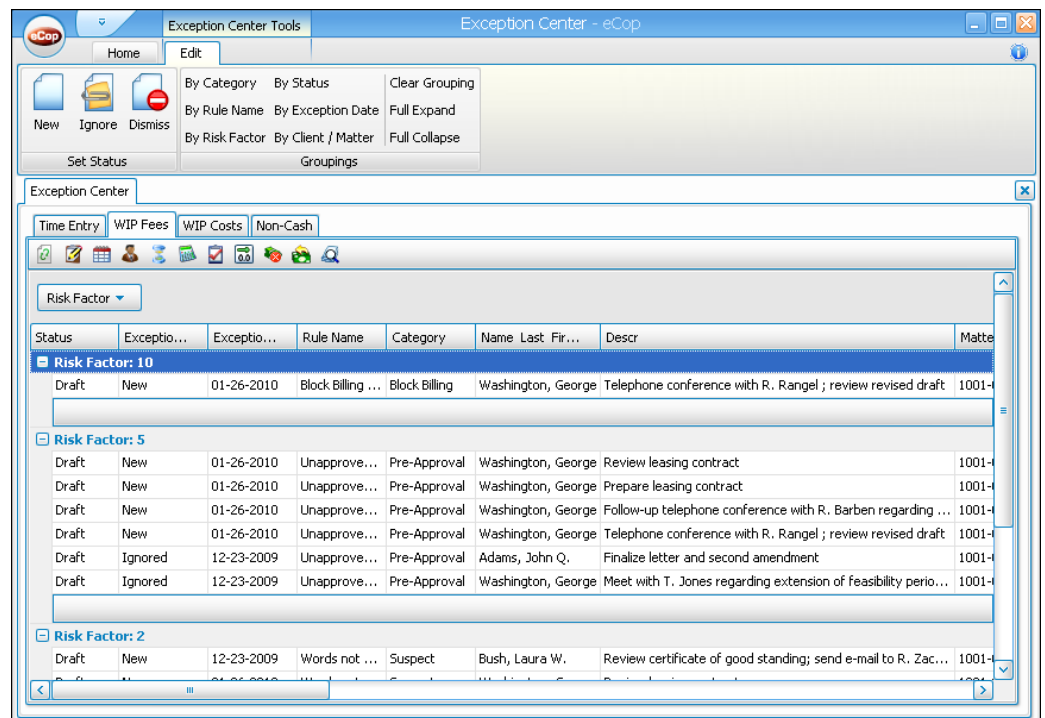


On-Demand Validation

At any time, the firm's controller, administrator, billing supervisor or other authorized user can select one or more unapplied time/cost entries, A/P invoices or WIP entries in the system and run them against the current RuleSets. All rule violations are automatically flagged and displayed in the grid-based eCop Exception Center for review and correction.

Nightly Batch Routine Validation

During the system's nightly batch routine, eCop automatically searches for, and identifies, all rule violations and displays them in the eCop Exception Center for review and correction.



Automated Training Tool

With thousands of active client matters, it's virtually impossible for any timekeeper to remember and comply with all the numerous and ever-changing billing rules for each of their clients.

"Before eCop, we spent a huge amount of time training our timekeepers and sending them reminders about adhering to client billing rules," says Debby Johnson.

With the "real time validation" feature of eCop, every timekeeper is continually alerted to rule violations as they occur during time entry. It's like having a full-time trainer supporting every timekeeper.

"eCop is a great training tool," says Debby Johnson. "We're seeing good rules compliance now by all of our timekeepers."

"Training our timekeepers to use eCop didn't require much time at all," says Janet Dotson. "And, it's helped us with our objective of getting it right at the front end of the process so there's less time needed during the pre-bill review process."

"Inserting written instructions on how to fix each specific billing rule error into the eCop pop-up alert box provides our timekeepers with instant answers to their questions without having to call us every time," says Francine Doran-Wrycza.

"eCop helps us at all levels," says Carmen Webb. "We were initially concerned that the attorneys would find it burdensome, but they see the obvious benefits and are very excited about the product."

Minimize Rejected Bills

Most law firms spend a significant amount of time every month reviewing, correcting and appealing rejected bills due to non-compliance with client billing rules. With eCop, firms are experiencing a dramatic reduction in rejected bills resulting in major time savings and faster payment from clients.

Janet Dotson explains, *"With a rejection, the added time it takes to review, correct and resubmit the bill can stretch our time to get paid to 3 - 8 months. With eCop, the amount of staff time we spend to appeal rejected bills has been reduced from 24 hours every month down to just 8 hours."*

"Our accounting staff used to spend at least 30 to 50 percent of their time chasing down and correcting bills that had been rejected due to non-compliance," reports Carmen Webb. "And, our attorneys were bogged down justifying work they had already completed. Now, with eCop, the reduction in processing time and paperwork has given us more free time to tackle all the other projects that have been sitting on the back burner."

eCop Dashboard in Visual Xpress®

eCop even has its own dedicated dashboard within Omega's Visual Xpress. With just a glance, users can instantly see "where they stand" with regards to billing rules compliance. The constantly updated 30-day trend lines show whether the firm is improving, or not, in their performance. And, they can see which clients are experiencing the most problems with rules compliance and who the biggest offenders are within the firm.

For Improved Internal Control

eCop isn't just for ebills. And, it can be used for more than just compliance with clients' billing rules. Omega uses eCop in-house to control the uniformity, terminology, syntax and even punctuation of its own out-going bills to clients. *"While many of our custom programming projects are worked on by many different people in different departments, we want all of our bills to look as if they were written by one person,"* says Sheresa Galbreath, Omega's bookkeeper for the past ten years. *"eCop helps us do that."*

Sheresa uses the eCop dashboard in Omega's Visual Xpress to view errors and then, from eCop's Exception Center, to quickly drill down to a specific time entry to correct the error. *"eCop saves me at least 2-3 days a month at billing time."*

Final Word

"It's a powerful tool to use to automate the billing process," says Debby Johnson.

Janet Dotson adds, *"The most important benefit for us is that by eliminating rejected bills, eCop has minimized the amount of time we have to spend on the appeals process."*

"I believe eCop will quickly pay for itself by significantly reducing the time and effort everyone expends on the review and appeals process, resulting in our working smarter as a firm and bringing income in the door without delay," says Carmen Webb.

