



Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
State of Illinois
Maureen O'Donnell, Acting Director
Illinois Department of Central Management Services

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Illinois leads nation in using “digital signatures” to speed services

Illinois has become the national leader in using technology to enable first responders, businesses, citizens and government agencies to encrypt, send and receive critical forms and public-safety data with legally binding “digital signatures” – helping to streamline processes, secure data, reduce paperwork and speed transactions.

More than 40 agencies, universities and public-safety forces in Illinois now use this technology – made possible via a contract with Entrust, Inc. negotiated by CMS, which provides IT and procurement services for State agencies.

Any governmental entity in Illinois now has a standardized and secure way to authenticate businesses and citizens, enable them to secure data through encryption and use digital signatures to transmit that information, via the “Public Key Infrastructure” or PKI environment that CMS operates.

That environment has grown tremendously in Illinois over the past four years, as more and more agencies realize the importance of maintaining the integrity and security of their data, the opportunity to streamline online transactions and the ability to improve public access to their services. Since the statewide contract means that agencies don't have to build this capability themselves, they save money and time. By March 2003, the State had certified 5,600 citizens and entities to enable encrypted filing of pollution reports, criminal background

checks and other critical data; today, Illinois issues more digital certificates than that every four months, and the total count has passed 107,000 – the most of any state in the country.

Another first: Illinois is the only state to successfully cross-certify with the U.S. government, which allows state-certified participants to interact directly with federal agency systems.



Treated discharge from a wastewater treatment facility

“The Illinois EPA's eDMR system was the first in the state to accept digitally signed legal documents using the PKI Infrastructure, and the system has become a model for the U.S. EPA and other states. The facilities we serve really appreciate being able to submit their Discharge Monitoring Reports electronically. We're now working to expand this capability to other forms and Agency programs.”

**– Doug Scott,
Director, Illinois EPA**

In the emergency preparedness arena, the Entrust technology enables the Illinois State Police to provide local public-safety entities access to the State Terrorism Information Center, the Chicago Department of Public Health to provide medical facilities with access to its Health Alert Network, and the Illinois Terrorism Task Force to provide secure biometric credentials to first responders.

Using PKI, future teachers apply for financial aid via the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, Medicaid providers locate client benefit information online, and water-treatment facilities submit their wastewater discharge monitoring reports with the Illinois EPA.

To date, 15 other states have contacted Illinois for advice about how they can use the technology to improve their own government operations. And CMS has been asked to speak about its success at a national Gartner Group conference in June.