

NERC

NORTH AMERICAN ELECTRIC
RELIABILITY CORPORATION

ALIGN

Regional Entity Newsletter

September 2021

INSIDE THIS EDITION

[Webinar Announced](#) | [Release 2 Launch Update](#) | [Release 3 Update](#) | [Release 4 Announcement](#)
[Data Handling in the ERO SEL](#) | [FERC Access](#) | [E-Mail Notification Update](#) | [Canada](#) | [Accessing Align and the ERO SEL](#)
[Quick Links for Reference](#) | [Want to Learn More? Key Contacts and Resources](#) | [About the Align Newsletter](#)

LET'S GET ALIGNED: KEY TAKEAWAYS

ERO Enterprise Webinar on Align and ERO Secure Evidence Locker

From 2:00–3:30 p.m. Central on September 28, 2021, the ERO Enterprise will hold an informal [webinar](#) as an outreach opportunity to ensure industry remains informed and to support industry readiness on Align and the Secure Evidence Locker (SEL). The presentation will cover the following:

- Lessons Learned: Align Release 1, Release 2, and SEL
- Change Readiness Assessment Pulse Check: Release 1 and Release 2
- Access Provisioning
- Coordinated Oversight/Multi-regional registered entities (MRRE)
- What's Next: Release 3 and Release 4
- Data Handling in Align and the SEL
- Legacy Systems: webCDMS and Compliance Portal
- Training Resources

Click here for: [Webinar Registration](#)

Release 2 Launch Update

Release 2, launched on July 19, will be rolled out and adopted by all Regions by October 1, per the schedule below. Release 2 functionality includes:

- Technical Feasibility Exceptions (TFEs)
- Periodic Data Submittals (PDSs)
- Self-Certifications
- Attestations
- ERO SEL to include evidence submission for the above activities

Release 2 Go-Live Dates			
Regions	TFE	PDS	Self-Certifications
MRO	7/19/2021	10/1/2021	10/1/2021
NPCC	7/19/2021	10/1/2021	10/1/2021
ReliabilityFirst	7/19/2021	10/1/2021	10/1/2021
SERC	7/19/2021	10/1/2021	10/1/2021
Texas RE	7/19/2021	7/19/2021	7/19/2021
WECC	7/19/2021	8/2/2021	9/1/2021

Please contact your regional training leads with any questions about Release 2.

Release 2 Training Contacts	
Region	Training Leads
MRO	Desiree Sawyer ; Jeremy Mattke ; Rob Quinlan
NPCC	Daniel Kidney ; Duong Le ; Kimberly Griffith
ReliabilityFirst	Bob Folt ; Bob Yates ; George Spila ; Anthony Jablonksi ; Ron Ross
SERC	Alex Shestopal ; Derek Lepresti ; Janice Carney ; Rafael Lerdo ; Rick Dodd ; Shawna Speer
Texas RE	Ben Gregson ; Dennis Glass ; Devin Kitchens ; Eric Newnam ; Penny Kerr ; Rochelle Brown
WECC	Aldo Nevarez ; Angie Shapiro ; Duane Cooke ; Jessica King ; Tyler Whiting

Release 2 training materials, including videos, user guides, and start, stop, continue guides, are available on the [NERC Training site](#).

Release 3 Update

The project team completed the development of Release 3 in September and is currently conducting regression testing. End-to-end quality assurance (QA) testing and user acceptance testing (UAT) will commence in the next few weeks. Announcements regarding the go-live date and

adoption plans for Release 3 will be announced in November. Release 3 functionality will consist of core capabilities for audits, audit planning, and scheduling.

Release 4 Announced

As announced at the August NERC Board of Trustees meeting, the Align project team added Release 4 to the project schedule for 2022. The ERO Enterprise remains committed to the effectiveness of the compliance monitoring and enforcement program (CMEP) and invested in the Align and SEL tools to improve the security, automation/efficiency, and harmonization/consistency of CMEP activities. Release 4 will encompass functionality originally scheduled for Release 3: inherent risk assessments (IRAs), compliance oversight planning (COP), and enhancements to audits, audit planning, and scheduling.

The main reason for the bifurcation is taken from the lessons learned with Release 1 and Release 2: take deliberate steps and break the effort into pieces to ensure each release is properly implemented. An example of this approach was the phased rollout of Release 1 by Region and the phased rollout of Release 2 by function.

As the project team worked with ERO Enterprise Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to identify the specific requirements around functionality for IRAs, COPs, and audits, it became clear that these processes, which were never automated nor harmonized, would be too large for a single release. The ERO Enterprise uses 18 separate tools to complete this work today—from webCDMS and CITs to SharePoint, FTP sites, and Microsoft Office tools.

Given the importance of these processes to the effectiveness of the CMEP, the project team decided to focus on providing core functionality for audits, audit planning, and audit scheduling in Release 3, deferring the functionality for IRAs, COPs, and enhanced audit capabilities until a new Release 4 in Q3 2022. A specific go-live date for Release 4 will be announced after Release 3 is adopted.

Data Handling in the ERO SEL

The NERC compliance team released a [guidance document](#) on data handling in the ERO SEL. The purpose of the guidance document is to provide provides clarity regarding the storage and maintenance of registered entity and ERO Enterprise-created or -provided information related to CMEP activities in Align and the SEL. It provides general principles to support ERO Enterprise program alignment, but individual facts and circumstances, as well as experience with the Align and SEL systems, may shape ERO Enterprise actions. There are examples of document and data types, and how they should be handled in both systems. Other topics in the document refer to benefits of Align and the ERO SEL, access to systems, and artifact retention policies. For questions or more information about the guidance document, please contact [Lonnie Ratliff](#), NERC's senior manager of Cyber and Physical Security Assurance.

FERC Access to Align and ERO SEL

The [Align business case](#) was recently updated to include information regarding access by authorized individuals at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and non-U.S. jurisdictions to Align and the ERO SEL. FERC users will access Align to view filing information and review summaries of items included with NERC's filings to FERC. This will ensure better communication and coordination between the ERO and FERC with regard to reliability matters within the United States. Additionally, FERC users will view dynamic reports created by NERC and driven by the Align reporting engine. While generally replicating existing U.S. reports that NERC submits to FERC today, this change will provide immediate access to the most accurate and up-to-date information available, eliminating the manual reporting process in existence today.

NERC and the ERO Enterprise are working with North America's non-U.S. regulators, specifically the Canadian provinces, to determine the best ways to support their reliability needs. Because each operates with different processes and procedures, each province will use Align differently and in stages. The approved Ontario Reliability Standards and functionality supporting Ontario implementation went live in mid-2021. Additional jurisdictions will be brought online as supporting features unique to each jurisdiction are developed.

For the ERO SEL, as appropriate, a Regional Entity can grant regulators access to specific activities within the ERO SEL. The same security and network architecture requirements that protect information in the ERO SEL when Regions and NERC are working are also required for regulator access. Regional Entities must also grant temporary access to specific engagements for each regulator user (as is the case for NERC users). This tightly controlled access ensures that only those with a true "need to know" are able to access the sensitive reliability information located inside the ERO SEL.

Additionally, the ERO SEL provides regulators the ability to view submitted evidence without physically taking possession of the items reviewed. This critical capability prevents the unauthorized or inappropriate copying or distribution of confidential information beyond its intended audience.

Email Notification Update

Based on feedback from registered entity Align users, the ERO Enterprise will begin including the NERC Reliability Standard/Requirement and entity name information in emails triggered from the Align system. Without this information, Align users noted difficulty deciphering the applicability of the notifications to particular potential noncompliance. For users who manage more than one entity, it was difficult to know which noncompliance was associated with a specific entity.

The Align users also stated this additional information would aid in timely and accurate dissemination of information to appropriate staff, who then may take timely action if needed. NERC confirmed that Align supports encryption to other email services that support our security requirements. To ensure that the emails are encrypted, the registered entities should verify with their IT Staff that transport layer security (TLS)

is enabled on their mail server. The updated emails will go live in production on September 29, 2021. Please contact your regional representatives for more information regarding TLS requirements.

Canadian Jurisdictions' Use of Align

The Align project team is working with those Regions that support Canadian regulators (i.e., MRO, NPCC, and WECC) to create project plans and activities in support of using Align. These activities include determining high-level requirements by province, importing provincial standards data into Align, and defining the appropriate user roles.

Currently Ontario is live with Align as of Release 1 in May 2021. Future releases by province are in the works, with the target plan being that all provinces that wish to use Align can do so in 2022. Future updates on those plans will be published as they are finalized.

Accessing Align

An important part of the project's success is ensuring appropriate access to the system. An active ERO Portal Account is required to access Align and the ERO SEL. **Please follow the instructions below to verify an existing account or set up a new account and note that it takes 48 hours for a new account to be activated.** For password resets, select the "Forgot Password/Username" to reset a password. For questions or problems concerning ERO Portal accounts, please submit a support ticket [here](#).

All registered entities' primary compliance contacts (PCCs) should also have an ERO Portal Account and be set up as Align Registered Entity Submitters and the Entity Administrators responsible for approving access requests. Users approved by the PCCs are automatically given an ERO SEL submitter role. Additional access to the ERO SEL outside of Align access must be handled with a support ticket.

Refer to the [Registered Entity User Access Guide](#) for detailed instructions.

To Set Up an ERO Portal Account:

1. Navigate to <https://eroportal.nerc.net>.
2. Select "Register" in the upper left-hand corner.
3. Complete the registration form and click "Submit."

To Verify an ERO Portal Account:

1. Navigate to <https://eroportal.nerc.net>.

2. Select “Sign In” in the upper left-hand corner.
3. Enter your credentials to confirm access to ERO Portal.

Quick Links for Reference

Here is a list of links to commonly requested project materials for Align and the ERO SEL. Please reach out to your Change Agents for additional materials.

Quick Links
FAQs
Align Governance Model (Updated April 2021)
Registered Entity SEL Requirements (Updated February 2021)
NERC Training Site
Release 1 CEA User Guide
CEA SEL User Guide
Release 2 CEA User Guide
Registered Entity User Access Guide
Data Handling Guide to Align and ERO SEL
Align Business Case

Want to Learn More? Key Contacts and Resources

Please submit questions to AskAlign@NERC.net or reach out to your Regional Change Agent. The change agents meet monthly and have the latest project updates. They are another resource for asking questions or sharing comments and feedback on the project.

Align Change Agents	
Organization	Change Agents
MRO	Desiree Sawyer , Marissa Falco
NERC	Chris Boyd-Witherspoon , Jamie Calderon , Farzaneh Tafreshi , Sara Minges
NPCC	Jason Wang , Kimberly Griffith
RF	Anthony Jablonksi
SERC	Andrew Williamson , Janice Carney , Melinda Montgomery , Rick Dodd , Todd Curl
Texas RE	Rochelle Brown

WECC

[Angie Shapiro](#), [Ben Aldous](#), [Mailee Cook](#)

ABOUT THE ALIGN NEWSLETTER

This newsletter compiles a list of important Align project updates with actionable deadlines, as well as upcoming events, recently posted resources, and other relevant news and information. Please email AskAlign@nerc.net with feedback on this newsletter. Current and future newsletters and additional project resources, including the regularly updated [Align FAQs](#), can be found on the [Align Project Site](#).