

Introduction to Evictions

Deputy John Porter
Denton County, Precinct 3
John.Porter@dentoncounty.com

1

Topics

- General eviction process
- What is an eviction citation?
 - Definitions
 - Issuance of the citation
- Requirements of the eviction citation
- Dates & times for service
 - Expiration for service
- Who may serve the eviction citation
- Methods of service
- Duties and requirements of the officer
- Return duties and requirements of the officer

© Copyright 2021. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without prior written permission of the Texas Justice Court Training Center unless copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address inquiries to: Permissions, Texas Justice Court Training Center, 2701 Directors Blvd, Suite 530, Austin, TX, 78744.

2

Resources

- Texas Rules of Civil Procedure (TRCP)
 - www.txcourts.gov
- Texas Property Code
- Texas Civil Practices and Remedies Code
 - www.statutes.capitol.texas.gov
- TJCTC Deskbooks - www.tjctc.org
 - Texas Civil Process Field Guide
 - Civil Deskbook

3

General Eviction Process

4

- ## General Eviction Process
1. Landlord gives tenant a notice to vacate.
 2. Landlord files an eviction suit in justice court.
 3. Court issues an eviction citation to be served on the tenant.
 4. Eviction case goes to trial and the judge enters a judgment.
 5. After the judgement is issued, the loser has five days to appeal to county court
 6. If the landlord wins, a writ of possession can be issued.
 7. Sheriff or constable posts 24-hour notice of the writ of possession on the property's front door.
 8. Sheriff or constable executes the writ of possession, tenant is forced to move out, and landlord or tenant removes personal items from the property.

5

What is an Eviction Citation?

6

What is an Eviction Citation?

- It is the official process by which a tenant (defendant) is notified he or she is being evicted.
 - Issued after the landlord (plaintiff) provides a notice to vacate, files a petition and pays a fee.
 - Accompanied by a copy of the petition when it's served.
- The eviction citation provides notice to the defendant(s) of the opportunity to:
 - Answer,
 - Appear, and
 - Defend the suit.

TRCP 510

7

Types of Eviction Citations

- **Forcible Entry and Detainer**
 - A person enters the real property of another without legal authority or by force and refuses to surrender possession on demand. *Property Code § 24.001*
- **Forcible Detainer**
 - A person who refuses to surrender possession of real property on demand *Property Code § 24.002*
- **Procedures are the same!**

8

The Players

- **Landlord**
 - the owner, lessor, or sublessor of a dwelling but does not include a manager or agent of the landlord unless the manager or agent purports to be the owner, lessor, or sublessor in an oral or written lease. *Property Code § 92.001(2)*
- **Tenant**
 - a person who is authorized by a lease to occupy a dwelling to the exclusion of others and who is obligated under the lease to pay rent. *Property Code § 92.001(6)*

9

The Property

- **Premises**
 - a tenant's rental unit, any area or facility the lease authorizes the tenant to use, and the appurtenances, grounds, and facilities held out for the use of tenants generally.
Property Code 92.001(5)
- **Dwelling**
 - one or more rooms rented for use as a permanent residence under a single lease to one or more tenants.
Property Code 92.001(1)

10

The Contract

- **Lease**
 - Any **written** or **oral** agreement between a landlord and tenant that establishes or modifies the terms, conditions, rules, or other provisions regarding the use and occupancy of a dwelling.
Property Code 92.001(3)

11

Issuance of the Citation

- Eviction citations are issued by the justice court in the precinct where the property is located.
 - If filed in the wrong precinct, the court **MUST** dismiss. The case can't simply be transferred to the correct precinct.
- The judge and the court personnel **CAN** tell a landlord which precinct the property is located in.
 - **It is not legal advice – it is legal information!**
 - Precinct maps or an online resource can and should be made available to the public in each office.
Property Code § 24.004

12

Issuance of the Citation

- An eviction citation must be issued for **EACH** defendant.
- The officer must serve an eviction citation and petition on each defendant.
- A service fee will be charged for every eviction citation that has to be served.

13

Requirements of the Eviction Citation

14

Requirements of the Eviction Citation

- Styled "The State of Texas."
- Identifies the person to whom the eviction citation is directed = Defendant/Tenant.
- Includes the name and county of the court where the case is filed.
- Includes the cause number.
- Identifies all parties in the case.
- Includes the date of issuance of the eviction citation.
- Includes the date the petition was filed.
- States the plaintiff's cause of action and relief sought.
- Includes the name and address of the plaintiff's attorney, or the address of the plaintiff.

TRCP 510.4

15

Requirements of the Eviction Citation

- States the date the defendant must appear for trial.
- Informs the defendant that a default judgment may be entered if the defendant fails to appear in person for trial.
- Informs the defendant that, upon timely request and payment of a jury fee, no later than 3 days before trial, the case will be heard by a jury.
- Contains all warnings required by Chapter 24 of the Texas Property Code.
- Include the statement: "For further information, consult Part V of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, which is available online and also at the court listed in the citation."
- Identifies which court the eviction citation is returnable to.
- Is signed by the clerk of the court or the judge.
- Contains the court's seal.

TRCP 510.4

16

Trial Date

- Trial on an eviction case **CAN'T** be set:
 - Less than 10 days, or
 - More than 21 days,
 - After the petition is filed.

TRCP 510.4(a)(10)

17

Required Warnings

- The eviction citation **MUST** state:
 - "FAILURE TO APPEAR FOR TRIAL MAY RESULT IN A DEFAULT JUDGMENT BEING ENTERED AGAINST YOU."
- The following warning **MUST** be:
 - On the first page of the eviction citation,
 - In English and Spanish, and
 - In conspicuous bold print:

**"SUIT TO EVICT.
 THIS SUIT TO EVICT INVOLVES IMMEDIATE DEADLINES. A TENANT WHO IS SERVING ON ACTIVE MILITARY DUTY MAY HAVE SPECIAL RIGHTS OR RELIEF RELATED TO THIS SUIT UNDER FEDERAL LAW, INCLUDING THE SERVICEMEMBERS CIVIL RELIEF ACT (50 U.S.C. APP. SECTION 501 ET SEQ.), OR STATE LAW INCLUDING SECTION 92.017, TEXAS PROPERTY CODE. CALL THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS TOLL-FREE AT 1-877-9TEXTBAR IF YOU NEED HELP LOCATING AN ATTORNEY. IF YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO HIRE AN ATTORNEY, YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR LOW-COST LEGAL ASSISTANCE."
 Property Code § 24.0051**

18

Dates & Times for Service

22

Dates & Times for Service

- Eviction citations may be served Monday through Saturday, any time of the day.

TRCP 6

23

Expiration for Service

- Eviction citations must be served 6 days before trial.
- To compute time:
 - Exclude the day the petition is filed,
 - Count every day, including Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays, and
 - Include the last day of the period.
 - If the last day is a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the time period is extended to the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday.
 - If the last day for filing falls on a day during which the court is closed before 5:00 p.m., the time period is extended to the court's next business day.

• The court has discretion to extend the time period for service.
TRCP 4, 5, 500.5, & 510.4

24

Who May Serve the Eviction Citation

25

Who May Serve the Eviction Citation

- Eviction citations may be served by any:
 - Sheriff,
 - Constable,
 - Their deputies, or
 - Any person authorized by court order.
- The eviction citation may be served anywhere in the state.

TRCP 103, 501.2(a), & 510.4

26

Methods of Service

27

Methods of Service: Residential Evictions

- A residential eviction citation must be served by:
 - Personal service on the defendant at least 6 days before trial, **OR**
 - This is the preferred method.
 - Give defendant a copy of the citation **AND** the petition.
- Leaving a copy of the eviction citation and petition with:
 - Any person, other than the plaintiff,
 - Who is 16 years old or older,
 - At the defendant's usual place of residence,
 - At least 6 days before trial.
- Available option **AFTER** the above options are unsuccessful:
 - Alternative/Substituted Service

TRCP 510.4

28

Alternative/Substituted Service

- Alternative service = delivery of the citation to the premises.
 - **Must** be requested from and approved by the court.
 - Plaintiff or the serving officer can request alternative service.
- The eviction citation may be served by delivery to the premises **IF**:
 - The serving officer is unsuccessful in serving the citation on the defendant or a person age 16 or older at the defendant's residence,
 - The original petition includes all known addresses of the defendant, and
 - The serving officer files a sworn statement.

TRCP 510.4

29

Alternative/Substituted Service: Request Requirements

- The original petition filed by the plaintiff must state:
 - All known home and work addresses of the defendant, and
 - That the plaintiff knows of no other home or work addresses of the defendant in the county where the premises are located.
- The sworn statement filed by the serving officer must:
 - State the officer has made diligent efforts to serve the citation on at least **TWO** occasions to **ALL** addresses of the defendant, and
 - Include the times and places where service was attempted.

TRCP 510.4

30

Alternative/Substituted Service: Request Requirements

- Sample Request for Alternative Service (Eviction Case)
 - On the TJCTC website forms page under the "Evictions and Landlord-Tenant" category
 - <https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/forms.html>

31

Request for Alternative/Substituted Service

CASE NO. _____

IN THE JUSTICE COURT

PLAINTIFF _____

v. _____

DEFENDANT _____

COUNTY, TEXAS

REQUEST FOR ALTERNATIVE SERVICE (EVICTION CASE)

TO THE COURT:

The undersigned requests that the Court authorize alternative service of process by depositing a copy of the citation and petition with the sheriff's office or a person with a previous entry the age of 18 years or the defendant's usual place of residence has been established. I request the citation be deposited with the sheriff's office or at the address of the defendant in this County were made as follows:

Name of Person	Address of Defendant	Address of Sheriff
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

The plaintiff has taken to the premises all hours and work addresses of the defendant known to the plaintiff and has failed to be notified for the sheriff's office or the other name or work addresses of the defendant is necessary.

The plaintiff therefore requests that the Court authorize service of this citation with a copy of the petition attached on the defendant by (1) depositing it in the mail addressed to the defendant at the premises and sent by first class mail and (2) depositing it to the premises of the sheriff's office if the mail route is not possible or (3) depositing it to the premises of the sheriff's office if the mail route is not possible or (4) depositing it to the premises of the sheriff's office if the mail route is not possible, here by personally affixing it to the front door or main entry to the premises.

WITNESSED ON this _____ day of _____, 20__

 Plaintiff

 Defendant

TJCTC Forms Page at:
<https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/forms.html>

32

Alternative/Substituted Service

- If alternative service is authorized, the serving officer:
 - At least 6 days before trial,
 - Must deliver a copy of the citation and petition to the premises by placing it through a door mail chute or sliding it under the door, **AND**
 - Send copies by first class mail to the defendant at the premises.
 - If service through a mail chute or under the door is not possible, the serving officer may:
 - Post the citation and petition to the front door or main entry, **AND**
 - Send copies by first class mail to the defendant at the premises.
- TRCP 510.4

33

Methods of Service

- The defendant is the **ONLY** person who can be served at a location other than the eviction address.
- Alternative service can **ONLY** be done at the designated address for eviction.

34

Methods of Service: Commercial & Manufactured Home Evictions

- The general procedures and time limits that apply to all residential eviction cases also apply to commercial and manufactured home evictions.
 - In general, Chapter 24 of the Property Code & TRCP 510 will apply.
 - **EXCEPT** where Property Code Chapter 93 or 94 says something different.
- There are **NO** differences regarding service of the eviction citation.
 - There are differences regarding the writ of possession (*covered in the next class*).

35

Service Duties & Requirements of the Officer

36

Service Duties & Requirements of Officer

- For eviction citations, "officer" means law enforcement.
- The officer's **ONLY** responsibility is to hand the citation and petition to the person being served.
 - The officer **CANT** force a person to open the door or accept service.

37

Service Duties & Requirements of Officer

- When serving the eviction citation, the officer must:
 - Enter the citation into their record keeping system.
 - Write/stamp on the citation the date and time when the officer received it.
 - Write the date of delivery on the citation before giving it to the defendant.
 - Serve the citation on the defendant.
 - Proceed without delay.
 - Attempt service at all addresses provided.
 - Keep copies of all documents in accordance with established record retention schedules.
- TRCP 501.2*

38

Attempting Service

- The officer must make diligent efforts to serve the citation on at least **TWO** occasions to **ALL** addresses of the defendant.
 - Two attempts at **EACH** address, **not two attempts total**.
- **Remember:** alternative service cannot be requested until attempts to serve the defendant, or a person age 16 or older at defendant's resident, by personal delivery are unsuccessful.

39

Record Retention Schedules

- Records must be retained and may be destroyed pursuant to established retention schedules.
- Retention of records relating to service of process:
 - Local Schedule PS – Retention Schedule for Records of Public Safety Agencies
 - www.tsl.state.tx.us/sirm/recordspubs/localretention
 - Officeholding Deskbook Chapter 4, Section F.

40

Fee Collection

- The officer is **NOT** entitled to demand his or her fee for service in advance of serving the process.
 - The officer's fee is to be taxed and collected as other costs in the case.
- TRCP 126*

41

Return Duties & Requirements of the Officer

42

Return Duties & Requirements of Officer

- Once the eviction citation is served, the officer must complete a return of service.
 - The return of service can be attached to the citation **OR** it can be a separate document.
 - The original citation does not have to be returned.
 - The officer must sign the return and file it with the clerk of the proper court.
 - Return may be in person, electronically, or by fax.
 - The return **MUST** be filed at least one day before the trial date.
- TRCP 15, 16, 107, 501.3 & 510.4*

43

Requirements of the Return of Service

- Include the cause number.
 - Include the case name.
 - Include the name and county of the court where the case is filed.
 - Indicate the date and time the citation was received for service.
 - Include the name of the person served.
 - Indicate the address where the citation was served.
 - Include the date(s) and time(s) of service and/or attempted service.
- TRCP 107, 501.3, & 510.4*

44

Requirements of the Return of Service

- Indicate the manner of delivery of service and/or attempted service.
 - Description of what was served.
 - Name of the person(s) who served and/or attempted service.
 - If delivery was by alternative service, include the date the citation was delivered to the premises and the date the citation was placed in the mail.
 - Any other information required by rule or law.
 - Any additional information specific to the service that should be noted in the file.
- TRCP 107, 117, 501.3, & 510.4*

45

Safety When Serving

49

Safety When Serving

- Citations are not the most dangerous thing to serve, but tempers can flare when a person finds out they are being sued or evicted from their home.
- Always a good idea to:
 - Wear your vest.
 - Be aware of your surroundings.
 - Do research on the people you will be evicting
 - Don't get complacent.
- Just because the papers you're serving are civil doesn't mean the people you're serving are.

50

Citation Review & Discussion

51

Question 1

You receive an eviction citation on Monday August 6th with a trial date of Tuesday August 21st.

- 1. Monday August 13th
- 2. Wednesday August 15th
- 3. Monday August 20th
- 4. Tuesday August 21st

What is the last date you can serve the tenant with the citation?

52

Question 2

Same information as the previous slide except you know the tenant, Doug will be at church on Sunday August 12th.

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Sure, if he'll accept service at church

Can you serve him there?

53

Question 3

You go to Doug's house to try and serve him with the eviction citation and his wife answers the door. She says Doug isn't home, but she'll give him the papers.

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Only if she swears to you that she will give Doug the papers

Can you do this?

54

Question 4

Same facts as the previous slide except that you're serving Doug with a citation for a small claims case.

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Only if she swears to you that she will give Doug the papers

Can you give the citation to Doug's wife?

55

Question 5

It's Tuesday July 14th and you need to get Doug served with his eviction citation. The case has been assigned to you, but another deputy offers to go by and serve the citation since Doug's house is on his way home.

- 1. Yes, any deputy in your office can serve the citation
- 2. No, you have to serve the citation since the case has been assigned to you.
- 3. Yes, so long as your supervisor doesn't find out
- 4. Yes, but only after the case is transferred to the other deputy

Is this ok?

56

Question 6

You give the citation to Deputy Richards and he serves it to Doug at Doug's residence.

- 1. You fill out the return and sign your name as the executing officer since the case is assigned to you
- 2. You fill out the return but have Deputy Richards sign it since he was the one that served it
- 3. Deputy Richards fills out and signs the return since he was the one that served the citation
- 4. Return? What's a return?

Who fills out the return and files it with the court?

57

Question 7

The citation was served on August 13th and the trial is on August 21st.

1. August 13th
2. August 15th
3. August 20th
4. August 21st

What day does the return have to be filed by?

58

Question 8

Is there ever a time that scaling a 10ft barbed wire fence and posting a citation on a door could be considered proper service?

1. No, that's never an option
2. Yes, so long as you document in the return that you served it that way because the defendant wouldn't open the gate for you
3. Yes, so long as you request alternate service, it's approved by the court, and you send a copy of the citation by registered mail

59

Class Discussion

What is the craziest alternative service you have ever done?

60

Class Discussion

What are some “creative” ways people have avoided being served by you?

61

Class Discussion

What are the common problems you run into when serving citations?

62

COVID-19 Questions

Please bring any questions related to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Evictions to the optional Q & A session this afternoon.

Remember, you can find up-to-date information on the TJCTC Coronavirus Page: <https://www.tjctc.org/coronavirus.html>

63

Questions?
