The Quarterly Patent Docketing Audit

The four checks below are built to run once a quarter by a team of one or two, to keep things running smoothly for years to come. The appendix carries the US maintenance fee windows and a schedule for which checks to run in which quarter.

1. Coverage

This check finds assets the docket does not know about.

- [ ] Pull the full list of live assets from your ownership records rather than from the docket, including provisionals still inside their priority year.
- [ ] Confirm every asset on that list shows a next action with a date and a named owner. A firm name is not enough; the entry needs an individual.
- [ ] Check patents granted in the last quarter. Grant closes out the prosecution entries, so confirm someone opened the first maintenance fee entry.

2. Entry integrity

Sampling recent correspondence shows whether action items are becoming entries.

- [ ] Pull the last quarter of correspondence across 15 to 20 items from outside counsel and patent offices. Sample across firms and jurisdictions if volume is large.
- [ ] For each item with a deadline or a requested action, find the matching docket entry and check it for date, jurisdiction, and matter number.
- [ ] Record the sample's miss rate as this quarter's baseline.

3. Annuity ownership

Fees get paid by you, counsel, or a service.

- [ ] List every jurisdiction where you hold live rights, built from the asset records.
- [ ] For each jurisdiction, write down who pays. Get each named payer to confirm in writing once a year, since two parties can remember the same arrangement differently.
- [ ] Give extra attention to anything that changed hands since the last audit. Payment responsibility is commonly dropped during a transfer.

4. Continuity

The docket has to keep running when you are out.

- [ ] Name who covers the docket if you are out for six weeks, and label them clearly at the top of your reference file.
- [ ] Confirm that person can locate the docket, the credentials, and the pending response list without calling you.
- [ ] Once a year, update your named cover if necessary and walk them through one live matter end to end.

Appendix: the deadline calendar

US maintenance fees run from each patent’s issue date, so due dates spread across the year one patent at a time.

Payment window (after issue)	Grace period (surcharge applies)	Rights lapse if unpaid by	Large entity	Small entity	Micro entity	Fee code
3 to 3.5 years	3.5 to 4 years	End of year 4	$2,150	$860	$430	1551
7 to 7.5 years	7.5 to 8 years	End of year 8	$4,040	$1,616	$808	1552
11 to 11.5 years	11.5 to 12 years	End of year 12	$8,280	$3,312	$1,656	1553

Paying inside the grace period adds a surcharge of $540 for a large entity, $216 small, $108 micro. It is a separate fee code at each stage: 1554 at 3.5 years, 1555 at 7.5, 1556 at 11.5.

Miss the grace period and the patent lapses. Reviving it is a petition rather than a surcharge, and it is granted rather than guaranteed. Fee code 1558 covers a delay of a year or less, at $2,260 large, $904 small, $452 micro. Past a year it is fee code 1560, at $3,000, $1,200, and $600.

Foreign annuities are typically an annual fee keyed to each country's filing or grant anniversary. Each asset carries its own date. Check 3 builds the jurisdiction list that covers them.

What to run each quarter

First quarter
Run all four checks at full depth and record asset count, jurisdiction count, and miss rate as your baseline.

Second quarter
Run Coverage and Entry integrity in full. Spot check Annuity ownership for anything that changed hands.

Third quarter
Run Annuity ownership in full against the written jurisdiction list, and Coverage on everything granted or filed this year.

Fourth quarter
Run the Continuity walkthrough with your named cover, and note which patents enter a maintenance fee window next year.

Sources

Fee amounts and fee codes: [USPTO fee schedule](), effective January 19, 2025, last revised August 14, 2026. Verified August 26, 2026.

Payment windows and grace periods: [Maintain your patent](), USPTO.