PROGRESS AND PLANS OF NATIONAL NANOTECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE (NNI) AGENCIES

December 2019

Department of Commerce (DOC)[1]

United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

Summary

The USPTO mission is to foster innovation, competitiveness, and job growth in the United States by conducting high-quality and timely patent and trademark examination and review proceedings in order to produce reliable and predictable intellectual property rights; guide intellectual property policy, and improve intellectual property rights protection; and deliver intellectual property information and education worldwide. Although USPTO does not have any specific agency priorities with respect to nanotechnology R&D, it partners with other NNI participating agencies, industry, and outside technical experts to provide expert assistance and training for its examiners to ensure their ability to provide timely and informed review of patent applications in a wide variety of nanotechnology-related fields. It also provides publicly available patent data that has been used by NNI agencies, National Academies and PCAST assessments of the NNI, and other outside experts to analyze nanotechnology patent trends, both within the United States and in comparison to other countries (the latter drawing also from various international patent databases).

Key Technical Accomplishments by NNI Goal

Goal 2. Foster the Transfer of New Technologies into Products for Commercial and Public Benefit

The transfer of new technologies into products for commercial and public benefit depends on effective mechanisms that protect new ideas and investments in innovation and creativity. USPTO is at the cutting edge of the Nation's innovation system, providing intellectual property policy advice and guidance to the Executive Branch and granting patents on applications that meet the statutory requirements for patentability, including with respect to nanotechnology innovations. To keep pace with the rapid advances being made in nanotechnology, the USPTO continues to provide in-depth nanotechnology-specific training events for patent examiners as well as to foster communication among examiners across multiple disciplines. In addition, USPTO has a subset of patent examiners across all technology disciplines who serve as points of contact to assist other examiners with nanotechnology issues related to patent examining.

USPTO collects a variety of patent data that can be used as a benchmark to analyze nanotechnology development and for trend analysis of nanotechnology patenting activity in the United States and globally.

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In addition, USPTO has moved to a new patent classification system, the Cooperative Patent Classification (CPC), which is jointly managed by USPTO and the European Patent Office. This classification system is based on an internationally used patent classification system (IPC) that contains most of the world's patent documents. This move has created a more harmonized, internationally consistent classification of nanotechnology-related patent documents.