NERC
NORTH AMERICAN ELECTRIC RELIABILITY CORPORATION

ALIGN

Registered Entity Newsletter
April 2021

RELIABILITY | RESILIENCE | SECURITY

LET'S GET ALIGNED: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Release 1 Launch Update – MRO, NERC, and Texas RE Now Live!

ERO Enterprise leadership is excited to announce the Release 1 launch of the Align tool and the ERO Secure Evidence Locker (SEL) for MRO, NERC, and Texas RE as of March 31, 2021. Align and the ERO SEL are designed to process and track all compliance monitoring and enforcement activities with the goal of improving security and standardizing processes across the ERO Enterprise. WECC will launch Release 1 on May 10, and SERC, RF, and NPCC will launch on May 24. Ontario will also launch Release 1 with NPCC as the first Canadian province to use the tool.

"Using Align for the first time, for a self-log submittal, was a good experience," said Mandy Barta, lead regulatory compliance consultant for Evergy. "As with any new system, extended use ultimately creates needed familiarity, but the training that was provided by our Regional Entity was extremely important. There are also helpful training materials provided by NERC on their Training site. There were additional fields that popped up when certain selections were made for drop-down fields, which required a need to go back to the Business Units to obtain additional information. Both exploring the system prior to completing a submittal, and having a template containing all initial and potential fields, would allow for being completely prepared with all necessary data. Overall, the system was fairly easy to navigate and use," said Barta.

"The Align tool is intuitive and easy to use, and the training provided by Texas RE was helpful. A feature we were happy to see is the ability to save an entry in draft form in Align prior to submitting to the Region and that a saved draft is accessible/editable by other users within the entity. This does not exist in the legacy system (CDMS) or the CFR tool," added an anonymous registered entity user.

Release 1 includes self-reporting/self-logging, enforcement processing, and mitigation functionality in Align, as well as the use of the ERO SEL to collect registered entity-provided evidence as part of the ERO Enterprise's CMEP activities. The Regions have received approximately 60 submissions in Align to date. Registered entities that fall under Coordinated Oversight are expected to go-live with their Lead Regional Entity. The project team is continuing to work closely with MRO and Texas RE to address any issues that might arise for regional and registered entity users during this initial launch. These lessons learned will assist with the future Release 1 preparations for the remaining Regions. In addition, the team is also focused on ensuring business and system readiness for the other Regions leading up to their respective go-live dates. Visit the Align project site for the public launch announcement and more details on Release 1.

Release 1 Entity Training Resources

Release 1 training nears completion with all Regions holding training sessions to ensure registered entity staff are well equipped for the changes associated with Align and the ERO SEL. There are variations in the training schedule for different Regions based on their respective training plans and go-live dates. Registered entities that fall under Coordinated Oversight will be expected to go-live with their Lead Regional Entity (LRE).

All training materials can be found on the NERC Training Site, including videos on submitting evidence to the ERO SEL and running canned reports. You can navigate to the training videos relevant for your role as seen in the screenshots below.
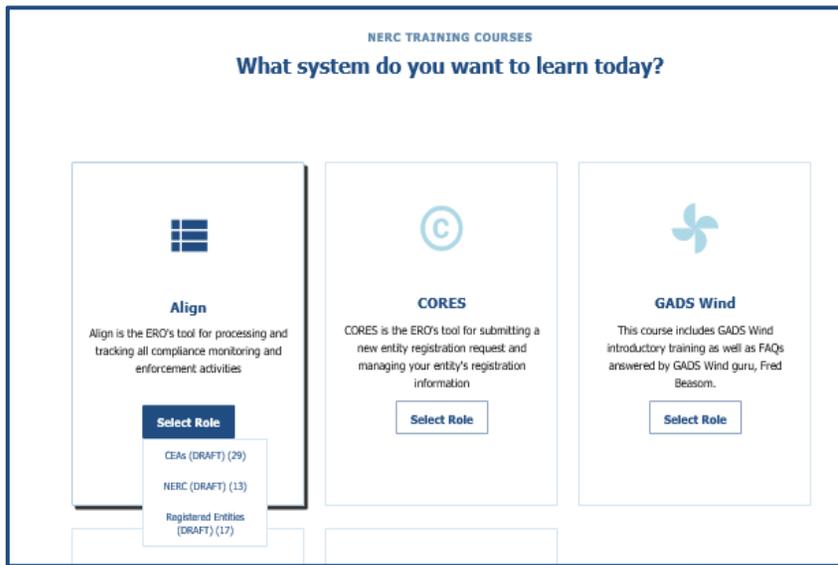

Figure 1.1: NERC Training Site

Figure 1.2: NERC Training Site

In addition to the training videos, the site contains comprehensive End-User and Start/Stop/Continue guides, all of which will be used during training. The End-User guides provide a detailed overview of how to navigate through Align Release 1 functionalities, while the Start/Stop/Continue guides provide detailed guidance on which activities move to Align and which activities stay inside the legacy systems.

"If you hit a roadblock, always go back to the Align training environment and all of the training materials NERC has posted. Also, if a long process document is a bit much to reference quickly, create 'cheat sheets' to help you perform a task more quickly or to find the information you need

more readily. Align and the SEL are simple platforms to use, you just have to find and create processes that work best for you," said Machelle Castro, Align Release 1 training lead and program coordinator, Enforcement for Texas RE.

Please visit the regional websites or reach out to the regional training leads listed below for any training-related questions.

Training Information by Region		
Region	**Regional Training Pages**	**Regional Training Leads**
MRO	MRO Page	Michael Spangenberg; Ryan McNamara
NPCC	-	Daniel Kidney; Kimberly Griffith
RF	RF Page	Bob Folt; Ron Ross
SERC	SERC News	Janice Carney; Rick Dodd; Shawna Speer
Texas RE	Texas RE Page	Machelle Castro; Rachel Coyne; Rochelle Brown
WECC	WECC Page	Angie Shapiro; Mailee Cook

For technical issues with Align Release 1, please submit a Help Desk ticket.

Release 2 Launch Update

As we prepare for the upcoming Release 2 launch on July 19, 2021, the project team and regional subject matter experts (SMEs) are continuing User Acceptance Testing (UAT) and will shift their focus to training soon. Training materials are currently in development, and regional and registered entity training sessions will be announced and held closer to the launch date.

Release 2 functionality will include:
- Technical Feasibility Exceptions (TFEs)
- Periodic Data Submittals (PDSs)
- Self-Certifications
- Attestations
- ERO SEL to include evidence submission for the above activities

More information on the Release 2 regional training schedule will be shared in the coming months.

Accessing Align: Act Now!

An important part of the launch success is ensuring appropriate access to the system. An active ERO Portal Account is required to access Align. **Please follow the instructions below to verify your existing account or set up a new account.** If you cannot remember your username/password, select the "Forgot Password/Username" to reset your password. If you have questions or problems concerning your ERO Portal account, please submit a support ticket here.

All registered entities should also have a primary compliance contact (PCC) set up with an ERO Portal Account. All PCCs with ERO Portal Accounts have been set up as Align Registered Entity Submitters and Entity Administrators responsible for approving access requests. Users who need access to Align can request access through the ERO Portal using the step-by-step instructions outlined in the Registered Entity User Access Guide. Please note that it takes 24 hours to approve access requests and assign permissions.

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.

Quick Links
FAQs
Release 1 MRO, NERC, and Texas RE Launch Announcement (March 31, 2021)
Align Governance Model (Updated April 2021)
Registered Entity SEL Requirements (Updated February 2021)
NERC Training Site
Registered Entities Align User Guide
Registered Entities SEL Portal User Guide

Want to Learn More? Key Contacts and Resources

Please reach out to AskAlign@NERC.net if you have any questions. You can also reach out to the Regional Change Agents, who meet on a monthly basis and have the latest project updates. They are another resource available to you 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	Ray Sefchik
SERC	Andrew Williamson, Janice Carney, Melinda Montgomery, Rick Dodd, Todd Curl
Texas RE	Rochelle Brown
WECC	Ben Aldous, Mailee Cook, Michael Dalebout

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.