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MSC/Circ.1089  
6 June 2003

**GUIDANCE ON RECOMMENDED ANTI-FRAUD MEASURES AND FORGERY  
PREVENTION FEATURES FOR SEAFARERS' CERTIFICATES**

1 The Sub-Committee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping, at its thirty-fourth session (24 to 28 February 2003), recalled its consideration at its previous session of preventative measures aimed at combating unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency and the list of high priority actions that had been identified. In order to promote such preventative measures, the Sub-Committee developed guidance on recommended anti-fraud measures and forgery prevention features for seafarers' certificates, as given at annex.

2 The Maritime Safety Committee at its seventy-seventh session (28 May to 6 June 2003) subsequently endorsed the guidance developed by the STW Sub-Committee and approved this circular.

3 The Maritime Safety Committee has also adopted MSC/Circ.1090 which provides guidance relating to various unlawful practices, which have been detected, in connection with certificates of competency. MSC/Circ.1090 provides a further useful source of information which may be used in the efforts to address attempts of fraud or forgery.

4 The Organization will continue its efforts to address the issues of fraud or forgery in this area. In this respect it would be beneficial if Member Governments reported to the Organization details of the various forms of fraud or forgery they may detect so as to enable the Organization to identify new or emerging trends or patterns.

5 Member Governments are invited to bring this circular to the attention of all concerned.

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## ANNEX

**GUIDANCE ON ANTI-FRAUD MEASURES AND FORGERY  
PREVENTION FOR SEAFARERS' CERTIFICATES****1 Introduction**

1.1 Although a number of Member Governments have adopted, over the years, various features, measures or procedures for the purpose of preventing fraud, tampering with or forgery of certificates issued by them, a study<sup>1</sup>, recently undertaken by the Organization, has indicated that fraudulent or forged certificates continue to appear.

1.2 The aim of this guidance is to provide, on the basis of the findings of the aforesaid study, information on the various anti-fraud and anti-forgery measures and procedures a Member Government may adopt.

1.3 This guidance recognizes that a number of Member Governments have in place measures or procedures addressing the issue of fraud and forgery. It is up to each Member Government to decide how to make use of the guidance provided in this circular or at which stage it will revise existing or introduce new measures or procedures in this respect. However, in view of the possibility that various forms of fraud may have been involved in the issue of certificates, in the past, and that this may, unintentionally, have not been detected, Member Governments should consider how this aspect should be addressed in connection with any certificates which have been issued by them in the past.

1.4 This guidance does not suggest that certificates, already issued to seafarers, should be withdrawn or reissued. Nevertheless, in case a Member Government decides to revise its existing measures or procedures or to introduce new ones, it is advisable to maintain appropriate records through which it will be possible to easily identify the arrangements which were applied when a specific certificate was issued.

**2 Use of modern technology**

2.1 During the recent years the word processing and printing technologies have rapidly advanced and nowadays offer a considerable number of options when it comes to features which aim at preventing fraud or protecting documents from tampering. As a result of the technological advancements, the relative costs of these features have considerably decreased and any document may include more than one feature. The most common features, widely available nowadays, include *inter alia* the following:

- .1 the use of special inks;
- .2 the use of gradient colours;
- .3 the use of special security paper or of paper containing watermarks visible when the document is held at an angle against the light;
- .4 the use of fluorescent ink visible with ultraviolet light;
- .5 the use of digitized photographs and/or signatures;
- .6 the use of smart chips or bar codes;

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to "Unlawful Practices Associated with Certificates of Competency", a study undertaken by the Seafarers' International Research Centre (SIRC), Cardiff University and presented to STW 33.

- .7 special thermal coverage of the seafarer's photograph;
- .8 the use of heat sealed laminates; and
- .9 the use of features, such as redundant data, which are carried over in digital images or other copies.

2.2 Member Governments should make, and encourage, the use of modern technology features to prevent fraud and to protect the integrity of certificates. The use of modern technologies makes replication of the certificates extremely difficult and attempts to alter data easily detectable.

2.3 Member Governments, when considering the use of smart chips or bar codes or other similar features, should carefully consider the type and nature of the data to be included in such features bearing in mind the need to protect, and to ensure the confidentiality of, the personal information of each seafarer.

### **3 Structured anti-fraud and anti-forgery policies and procedures**

3.1 In compliance with regulation I/8 of the STCW Convention, 1978, as amended, and section A-I/8 of the STCW Code, Parties should develop and implement appropriate structured anti-fraud and forgery prevention policies and procedures, which may include various measures as follows:

- .1 policy objectives;
- .2 features to be included in each certificate;
- .3 procedures to control the printing, storage, handling and distribution of blank certificates;
- .4 procedures to be followed when issuing certificates;
- .5 procedures for handling (or condemning) defective or damaged blank certificates or certificates which have been identified as containing errors after they have been prepared for issue;
- .6 procedures for maintaining and updating records of certificates issued;
- .7 procedures for the issue of certificates to replace the ones which are lost or damaged;
- .8 procedures or measures to prevent unauthorized access to databases containing information relating to certificates and related records;
- .9 procedures for internal auditing;
- .10 procedures for investigating alleged frauds or forgeries; and
- .11 procedures for periodic review of the measures and procedures in place.

3.2 When developing structured policies and procedures the competent authorities may benefit from the knowledge and experience of other Government services which are engaged in the issue of documents (e.g. passports, identification documents, driving licences, etc.) which require protection from fraud or forgery.

3.3 Member Governments should identify which of the measures and procedures (e.g. features of certificates, controlling or handling blank certificates, conduct of unscheduled internal audits) implemented by them need to be protected from unauthorized access or disclosure so as not to compromise the overall objectives.

3.4 When considering or developing new, or revising existing, relevant policies, procedures or measures, Member Governments should bear in mind, the need to protect, and the need to ensure the confidentiality of, the personal information of each seafarer.

#### **4 Ancillary Certificates**

4 Ancillary certificates (i.e. those certificates issued under the provisions of STCW chapters V and VI) do not always contain the same level of counter-forgery protection as certificates of competency.

4.1 Member Governments should:

- .1 consider developing standardized formats for ancillary certificates issued by the Administration to seafarers after they have successfully passed training courses at maritime training establishments;
- .2 consider and determine the features and the protective measures to be included in ancillary certificates so as to make forgery difficult and enable the easy detection of tampering;
- .3 consider and determine which of the ancillary certificates, issued by them, should include the photograph of the seafarer; and
- .4 consider establishing appropriate procedures through which the issue of such certificates will be monitored and controlled.

#### **5 Maritime Training Providers**

5.1 Member Governments should, bearing in mind this Guidance, consider, establishing procedures to be applied (or guidelines to be followed) by maritime training providers when they are authorized to issue certificates on the basis of the various programmes they offer.

5.2 In addition, Member Governments should consider establishing the measures or procedures they will apply for the purposes of either regular monitoring the issue of certificates by such maritime training providers or for responding to requests for verification of the authenticity of such certificates.

#### **6 Reporting alleged frauds or forgeries**

6.1 Member Governments should establish and widely disseminate the contact points to which alleged frauds or forgeries are to be reported (e.g. seafarers, maritime training providers, Companies, masters, manning agents and other Governments), as well as information on the documents which should be submitted to them for investigating such cases.

#### **7 Penalties and disciplinary measures**

7.1 Member Governments should establish an appropriate administrative and legal framework through which alleged frauds or forgeries will be investigated and, in case the allegations are confirmed, for imposing appropriate severe penalties and/or taking disciplinary measures against

seafarers holding fraudulent or forged certificates, or for imposing appropriate penalties against the Companies<sup>2</sup> who knowingly employ them.

## **8 Effective communications**

8.1 In order to facilitate the timely detection of fraudulent or forged certificates, Member Governments should establish effective communications with Governments recognizing their certificates and Governments whose certificates they recognize.

8.2 In this respect Member Governments should also endeavour to provide prompt responses to requests for verification of the authenticity of certificates and responses to any subsequent requests for clarifications, in a timely manner.

8.3 Member Governments should consider, in order to facilitate the verification or authentication of certificates issued by them, which of the features of their certificates could be shared, in a secure manner, with other Member Governments.

## **9 Actions during port State control inspections**

9.1 Member Governments should consider establishing appropriate procedures through which, certificates that have been identified following consultations with the issuing authority, as fraudulent, forged or tampered with, are seized and removed from the ship. In such cases, if the certificates in question are removed from the ship, these should be handled by the port State in consultation with the Member Government identified on the certificate and with the State whose flag the ship flies.

## **10 Actions when examining applications for the issue of endorsements of recognition**

10.1 Member Governments should consider establishing appropriate procedures, to be applied when examining applications for the issue of endorsements of recognition, through which, certificates, that have been identified following consultations with the issuing authority as fraudulent, forged or tampered with, are seized. In such cases, the arrangements regarding the seizure and the handling of such certificates should be discussed between the Governments concerned.

## **11 Research**

11.1 Systematic research into records would identify fraud or forgery patterns and would enable Member Governments to establish and implement appropriate effective preventive and pro-active measures and to monitor the effectiveness of those in use.

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<sup>2</sup> As defined in regulation I/1.23 of the STCW Convention, 1978, as amended.