

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATES

1. Introduction

1.1 Signed paper certificates issued by flag States and recognized organizations authorized to act on their behalf have been the traditional means of documenting compliance with IMO requirements.

1.2 Flag States using electronic certificates, including printed versions of electronic certificates have experienced instances of Port State Control authorities denying the validity of these certificates, resulting in a burden to the master and crew, ship owner or operator, Port State Control authorities, Administration, and other stakeholders.

1.3 In addition, ships have experienced instances of Port State Control actions because a traditional paper certificate has been issued but has not arrived on the ship, or the traditional paper certificate has been damaged or lost.

1.4 Establishing a recognized set of features for using electronic certificates should help alleviate problems inherent in reliance on paper.

1.5 In order to facilitate the use and acceptance of electronic certificates the IMO Facilitation Committee has approved guidelines for the use of electronic certificates.¹

2. Guidance for verification

2.1 For the purpose of this Guidance:

1. Certificate means a document issued by an Administration or its representatives that is used to show compliance with IMO requirements and used to describe operating conditions, crewing requirements, and ship equipment carriage requirements. The term "certificate" does not include publications, manuals, instructions or ships' logs used to record ongoing operations;
2. Electronic certificate means a certificate issued in an electronic format;
3. Electronic signature means data in electronic form which is attached to or logically associated with other electronic data to serve as a method of authentication of the issuer and contents of the electronic data;
4. Printed version of electronic certificate means a paper printout produced from the electronic certificate;
5. Unique tracking number means a string of numbers, letters or symbols used as an identifier to distinguish an electronic certificate issued by an Administration or its representative from any other electronic certificate issued by the same Administration or its representative; and
6. Verifying means a reliable, secure and continuously available process to confirm the authenticity and validity of an electronic certificate using the unique tracking number.

2.2 Flag States that use electronic certificates should ensure that these electronic certificates include the following features:

1. validity and consistency with the format and content required by the relevant international convention or instrument, as applicable;
2. protected from edits, modifications or revisions other than those authorized by the issuer or the Administration;
3. a unique tracking number used for verification as defined in 2.1.5 and 2.1.6; and
4. a printable and visible symbol that confirms the source of issuance.

¹ FAL.5/Circ.39/Rev.2 with regard to Guidelines for the use of electronic certificates approved by the Facilitation Committee at its 40th session (4 to 8 April 2016).

2.3 Instructions for verifying (see paragraph 2.1.6) the information contained in the certificate, including confirmation of periodic endorsements, when necessary, should be available on board the ship.

3. Action to be taken

3.1 PSCOs should accept electronic certificates containing the features identified in section 2.2.

3.2 The PSCO may request the master to demonstrate the validity of the electronic certificate following the instructions available on board the ship (see paragraph 2.1.6).

3.3 If the master does not succeed to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the PSCO that an electronic certificate is meeting the requirements, the PSCO is advised to consult with the flag State.