



SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING
34th session
Agenda item 5

STW 34/5/3
18 December 2002
Original: ENGLISH

UNLAWFUL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCY

Certificates of Competency – Prevention of Fraud and Forgery

Submitted by the United Kingdom

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides an update on fraudulent practices associated with certificates of competency detected by the United Kingdom, and measures and proposals to deal with such occurrences.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 14

Related documents:

Introduction

1 Unlawful practice associated with certificates of competency is a continuing problem and the implications for safety are potentially very serious. The United Kingdom is committed to the prevention and detection of such practices, and continually reviews procedures and counter measures. This paper brings the types of unlawful practice detected by the United Kingdom to the attention of the Sub-Committee.

Types of unlawful practice

2 A variety of unlawful practices have been detected which fall into a number of categories:

- i. manufacture or tampering with the certificate of competency;
- ii. impersonation of a genuine seafarer;
- iii. falsifying information provided to employers;
- iv. forgery of ancillary certificates to apply for a genuine certificate of competency;
- v. falsifying sea service to apply for a genuine certificate of competency; and,
- vi. various methods of cheating in merchant navy examinations.

Manufacture and tampering with Certificates of Competency

3 United Kingdom STCW95 certificates contain a number of security features and are much more difficult to forge than the old STCW78 certificates. However, we have detected a small number of attempted forgeries, mostly attempts to alter the details printed in the certificate.

For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number. Delegates are kindly asked to bring their copies to meetings and not to request additional copies.

4 The United Kingdom certificates are currently being revised and the security features will be greatly enhanced. New features will use the latest technologies and make replication of the certificate extremely difficult, and attempts to alter data easily detectable. Features will include special security paper, special inks, digitised photographs and signatures, and heat sealed laminates. Other technologies could be used in support of paper documents, particularly smart chips or bar codes which are very hard to forge. The United Kingdom encourages all parties to regularly review their certificates to ensure maximum protection from forgery.

5 Certificates of competency and seafarer records should be maintained on a secure database. Access to the database should be strictly controlled, and the procedures for the issue of certificates robust to enable only authentic certificates to be issued.

Impersonation

6 A small number of cases of attempted impersonation have been detected, either with or without the knowledge of the other party.

7 Procedures for verifying identity need to be robust and reviewed regularly to ensure they meet the requirements. Secure national documents containing photographic identity eg passport, should be used to verify identity. The proposed new seafarer identity document under consideration by ILO may form a useful part of the identity verification process provided it meets the required standard for positive and verifiable proof of identity.

Falsifying information supplied to employers

8 We have found some cases where seafarers have claimed to prospective employers that they have capacities and limitations higher than those actually issued. They have convinced the employers of this by supplying altered photocopies of their certificates, and have been employed on the basis of these photocopies.

9 It is essential that employers verify the validity and authenticity of certificates using **original** certificates, and verify these by confirming with the issuing administration. The United Kingdom welcomes the initiatives to introduce web based verification of certificates, and is currently investigating the technical and legislative environment to establish its own site. Requests for verification need to be answered promptly.

Use of forged ancillary certificates to apply for a genuine COC

10 Ancillary certificates do not always contain the same level of counter forgery protection as certificates of competency. Ancillary certificates should contain sufficient protective measures to make forgery difficult and enable the easy detection of tampering. The procedures for the issue of certificates, and the replacement of lost certificates must be sufficiently robust to protect certificates from being obtained unlawfully.

Falsification of sea service

11 Discharge Book entries and sea service testimonials are routinely used to provide evidence of sea service. Some candidates falsify this information and the United Kingdom is therefore reviewing its procedures, including considering more effective checks with companies. The United Kingdom recognises that this may cause additional burdens to companies and the administration, but believes that increasing rigour in this area will enhance safety.

Cheating in examinations

12 We have found instances of candidates impersonating others in examinations, enabling poor candidates to benefit from more proficient ones. The United Kingdom is reviewing examination procedures, particularly with respect to verification of candidate identity.

13 The United Kingdom is committed to enhancing maritime safety and is actively pursuing issues of unlawful practices. It is very keen to see enhanced levels of co-operation in this area and will willingly work with other administrations and industry.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

14 The Sub-Committee is invited to note the above information.
