



SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING
33rd session
Agenda item 6

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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 information on progress to date in the United Kingdom, regarding the development of measures to reduce the possibility of fraud and forgery. The paper supplements the information in STW 33/6, which provides the final results of the research report into unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency. The paper also provides preliminary responses on some of the issues raised during the discussion at STW 32.

Action to be taken: Paragraph 7

Related documents: STW 33/6, STW 32/16, paragraph 6.17

Introduction

1 The issue of unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency (COCs) is a growing concern and quite rightly, is receiving increased attention by national Administrations and the IMO. The United Kingdom places a high priority on efforts to reduce unlawful practices, due to the obvious safety concerns that arise as a result of misconduct. This paper looks at some of the measures currently in place in the United Kingdom, discusses various issues and provides suggestions for future action.

Type and nature of unlawful practices

2 Various ways of obtaining unlawful COCs have been detected in the United Kingdom. The following summarises the various means and methods identified to date:

DIY (“Do it yourself”) Forgery – individuals have manufactured their own COCs, trying to replicate as closely as possible, original documents. The quality of these range from reasonably good (ie good enough not to be recognised by someone unfamiliar with an original), to very poor.

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Alteration – individuals have obtained a genuine certificate and have changed the details, e.g. name, date of birth, photographs etc. Again, the quality of the work varies.

Impersonation – individuals obtain the correct details from another COC and then impersonating the person to whom the COC has been legitimately issued, claim to have lost their certificate and apply for a replacement. We are also aware of a case where someone impersonated his deceased brother, who held a higher class of COC.

Forgery of ancillary certificates – instances have been encountered where applicants have forged copies of ancillary certificates e.g., examination results, vocational qualification passes, short course certificates, sea service testimonials and even apprenticeship indentures. These forged documents have then been submitted in the hope that a genuine COC would be issued.

Use of forged overseas certificates for entry to UK examinations – a number of cases have come to light where individuals have been able to obtain fraudulent overseas COCs and ancillary certificates, and have presented these to the UK Administration when applying for a UK COC.

Use of fraudulent STCW 78 COCs to obtain genuine STCW 95 COCs – instances have occurred where forged or fraudulent STCW 78 COCs have been used to obtain “genuine” STCW 95 COCs upon revalidation or upgrade. If the fraudulent nature of the STCW 78 COC is not detected at the time of issue, there is a great danger that a genuine STCW 95 COC will be issued.

Main areas of concern

3 *Certificates of Competency* – The United Kingdom’s STCW 95 COC is already harder to forge than the STCW 78 COC currently being replaced. Further enhancement to the certificate security would make it harder still to alter or replicate the COC. This is not the appropriate place to itemise all the possible specific security measures. However, in order to provide effective measures to counter both replication and alteration of COCs, reinforced security should be considered in the following areas;

- i. design and manufacture of the certificate paper;
- ii. design and construction of the COC;
- iii. use of special inks;
- iv. use of special printing techniques;
- v. scanning and printing of photographs and signatures; and
- vi. other security items.

Ancillary Certificates – Similar problems can occur with ancillary certificates and it is important to ensure that these also have adequate security features.

4 The United Kingdom believes that this issue needs to be addressed at the international level through the IMO. A more proactive approach through the IMO, working with all administrations to overcome this problem is supported. For instance, an international quality standard for counter forgery measures could be developed and adopted at IMO level. In this regard, it is noted that most countries’ passports follow a common format. This could encompass COCs, all ancillary training certificates, medical certificates, watch keeping certificates and short course certificates (where they are issued by the national Administrations).

Database control

5 The United Kingdom currently uses a Seafarer Documentation System (SDS) to hold all seafarer biographical and certification details. This system works well, and provides quick and easy access to all seafarer information. A number of enhancements have been made to it over the years, mostly to facilitate operational requirements. In order to improve the system further, scanning facilities are being investigated. This would enable seafarer photographs and signatures to be scanned and reproduced on the COC.

SDS enables the UK to advise overseas administrations very quickly of the validity and authenticity of UK COCs. Adding the capability to enter all ancillary certificates would further extend this facility and enhance counter fraud measures.

6 Other Administrations are not always as responsive as we would like to requests for information regarding their own COC holders, and this has caused problems on a number of occasions, particularly when assessing for Certificates of Equivalent Competency (CECs), or on one occasion when wishing to verify the validity of a COC held by the Master of a ship under detention. Counter fraud measures would be further improved if:

- i. all Administrations' databases met an agreed standard, and
- ii. upon request, all Administrations provided information to each other quickly.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

7 The Sub-Committee is invited to refer this paper to the Working Group on unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency, which it is anticipated will be established at this session, to facilitate progress on this important issue on an international basis.
