

PB-15 DOCUMENTS AUTHENTICATION

This Practice Bulletin addresses the following:

1. *Architects Act* Sections 2(2)(c), 2.1(3)(c)
2. *Architects Act General Regulation* Part 3 Section 42
3. Bylaws Part 9, Section 9.111(1)

INTRODUCTION

This practice bulletin combines and revises the previous *Practice Bulletin 15 – Using the Professional Seal Correctly – “Think Before You Seal”* and *Practice Bulletin 23 - Electronic Document Certification*. It elaborates on the meaning of the seal and includes instructions about how to manage a seal, who applies a seal, and when to apply a seal.

This practice bulletin provides advice regarding the standard of care in the use and application of the professional seal.

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) *Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP)* includes a comparison of provincial and territorial requirements regarding the application of seals. Each of the provincial regulators are bound by the provisions of their Act and regulations and these vary across the country. In Alberta, the *Architects Act* states:

- 2(2) *no person except a registered architect, visiting project architect, architect’s corporation or architects and engineers firm shall...*
- (c) *affix the seal or stamp of a registered architect or the stamp of a visiting project architect, architects corporation or architects and engineers firm, or permit that seal or stamp to be affixed, to a plan, drawing, detail drawing, specification or other document or a reproduction of any of them unless*
- (i) *that plan, drawing, detail drawing, specification or other document or reproduction was prepared by or under the personal supervision, direction and control of and*
- (ii) *the seal or stamp is affixed with the knowledge, consent or in accordance with the direction of the registered architect or visiting project architect to whom or the architects corporation or architects and engineers firm to which the seal or stamp was issued by the Registrar.*

There are similar provisions for Licensed Interior Designers under 2.1(3) of the *Architects Act*.

OVERVIEW

The holding of a seal granted by the Alberta Association of Architects (AAA) is an exclusive privilege and not a right. The seal must be utilized at all times in the public interest consistent with the mandate of the AAA and the *Architects Act*.

The application of the seal and signature to documents in either print or electronic format by an authorized entity of the AAA represents to clients, building authorities having jurisdiction, design stakeholders, building occupants, and the public in general that the design, advice and instructions, as represented in the documents or any other instruments of service, have been prepared and are provided under the personal supervision, direction and control of the *authorized entity*.

The Alberta Association of Architects

The signature and seal further indicates to the users of the documents that the design, advice or instructions have been prepared and provided in a manner that employs an inherent level and duty of care, diligence and professionalism reflective of the *Architects Act*, *General Regulation*, *Code of Ethics* and *Bylaws* and has fully considered applicable building and site design codes, standards, guidelines and practices. The signature and seal also notifies the building code authorities having jurisdiction about the individuals responsible for providing the specific scope of professional design services as required by the *Alberta Building Code* and the *Safety Codes Act*.

Ultimately, the signature and seal are typically reserved for application to print or electronic documents that are considered by the authorized entity to be complete, final and ready for their intended purpose or, to documents that are issued to clarify or revise prior design documents, advice or instructions.

However, there are also reasons for the use of seal on documents that may be qualified or incomplete, to clearly illustrate to third parties that professional involvement on a project is provided. An example of this is the issuance of preliminary submissions or Development Permit Applications to Authorities Having Jurisdiction.

The use of a seal is associated with a degree of authenticity beyond a signature alone which implies that fraud cannot be utilized in defense of misuse. This level of authentication demonstrates the importance of both the AAA and its members in managing the issuance, recovery and usage of seals with the utmost level of care and responsibility. It further implies the level of effort to which members are expected to exercise in protecting the access to, handling, use of and defense against the improper use of their individual seal.

The authorized entity applying a seal certainly also assumes professional liability upon which professional liability insurance brokers, underwriters and legal counsellors are able to advise.

APPLICABLE LEGISLATION

Members must use the professional seal issued to them by the AAA in accordance with the rules set out in the *Architects Act*, *General Regulation*, *Code of Ethics*, *Bylaws* and this practice bulletin. The professional seal is intended for personal use in connection with plans, specifications and other instruments of architectural service prepared under the responsible control of the professional and is not transferable. The issue of transferability is not found in a physical act of handing over the seal but in transferring or abrogating responsibilities given by virtue of the seal.

Legislative restrictions governing the use of the seal are as follows:

- (a) Section 2(2)(c) for Architects and Section 2.1(3)(c) for Licensed Interior Designers of the *Architects Act* makes it clear that a seal cannot be affixed to a plan, drawing, detail drawing, specification other document or reproduction unless the item was prepared by or under the personal supervision, direction or control of the professional;
- (b) Section 45 of the *Safety Codes Act* and the *Alberta Building Code* state that an individual who offers a design for use by others must ensure that the design complies with the requirements of this legislation and that the seal is affixed in accordance with the requirements of the *Architects Act*;
- (c) Part 3 Section 42 of the *Architects Act General Regulation* designates the professional as being responsible for conducting site reviews. Clearly if drawings, detail drawings, specifications and other documents or reproductions were prepared by or under the personal supervision, direction and control of a member, that member is in the best position to

The Alberta Association of Architects

understand and execute the construction review mandate established by law.

- (d) Part 9 of the *AAA Bylaws* describe how manual seals, signatures and corporate stamps shall be utilized, applied and controlled.
- (e) This practice bulletin, as approved by Council and the Practice Review Board as per its authority under Sections 6, 9, 10 and 39 of the *Architects Act*, applies to the general use of seals and the application of electronic seals.

A member must clearly understand that it is the professional's responsibility to design a building, that the act of designing is regulated by both the *Architects Act* and the *Safety Codes Act* and that the public expects that when the seal is affixed to a document it implies a minimum level of competency and participation in a project by that professional.

Any member who engages in activity or a working relationship with an unauthorized practitioner whereby professional responsibilities are carried out by others or that is aware of such activities and does not notify the AAA is in violation of the *Architects Act General Regulation* and *Code of Ethics* respectively:

1. Part 3 Section 36 of the *Architects Act General Regulation* states that members shall not make any arrangement or agreement whereby a non-architect may directly or indirectly engage in or hold himself out as able to engage in the practice of architecture; and
2. Rule 12 of the *Code of Ethics* requires all members to bring to the attention of Council any party involved in the unlawful practice of architecture.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES IMPLIED BY SEAL

The *Architects Act*, *General Regulation*, *Bylaws* and *Code of Ethics* exist to regulate the practice of architecture and licensed interior design in the public interest. The practice of architecture and licensed interior design cannot be performed within the requirements of the legislation unless the authorized entity maintains personal supervision, direction and control over the provision of its services. Personal supervision, direction and control means the continual instruction, guidance, inspection and examination of work in progress at intervals appropriate to the stage of development which the authorized entity considers necessary to meet the client's program of requirements and the requirements of the authority having jurisdiction, reflecting reasonable skill and judgment in its preparation.

A professional seal, dated and affixed with a signature to a document or other instruments of service, remains the only verification that the legislative requirements are met and that the document or other instruments of service can be relied upon for planning and design purposes or utilized for the construction of or alteration to a building.

When architects or licensed interior designers engage an outside contract service, such as a specification writer, specialty products supplier or any other individual or organization who provides related professional services, the authorized entity responsible for sealing the documents must also ensure that the services being provided are performed under their personal supervision, direction and control. These requirements relate to any registered architect and licensed interior designer acting as the professionals of record as a firm principal or on behalf of their employers.

When the preparation of documents is carried out in a location other than the office of the authorized entity, the difficulty associated with immediate access, personal supervision, direction and control is a potential risk. Additional liability may accrue to the authorized entity due to coordination challenges,

conflicts between the parties, staff, employer and the authorized entity supervising, directing and controlling the work, including copyright infringement, quality control, coordination of the design, related services and the issuance and use of documents.

It is incumbent upon the authorized entity to ensure sufficient supervision, direction and control in these circumstances in order to fulfill one's duties under the *Architects Act* with regards to the application of the seal.

Furthermore, as an underlying implication in applying a seal, members inherently assume responsibility for both the design and the review of the related construction for the explicit purpose of design compliance. The *Alberta Building Code* requires the same entity to sign and seal the A, B and C Schedules of Professional Involvement. While such obligations may be achieved through a combination of registered professionals under a mutually-accepted joint venture or consultant/sub-consultant written agreement, the entity applying the seal must assume responsibility for the entire scope of services as if it were his/her own.

Instances where an authorized entity is requested to seal documents prepared by other professional or non-professional individuals or organizations and prior to the involvement of the authorized entity represents a circumstance carrying significant personal, business and professional liability risk and is most certainly a clear violation of several aspects of the *Architects Act*, *General Regulations*, *Bylaws* and the *Code of Ethics* as well as the *Safety Codes Act* and *Alberta Building Code* if provided as a literal service.

In meeting the full intentions of the legislation, an authorized entity becoming involved in any of the latter basic stages of the work as described in the Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) is obligated to conduct whatever studies and investigations necessary to fully understand and accept all aspects of the design development process as developed by his/her predecessors as if it were his/her own. Furthermore, in accordance with the *Architects Act Code of Ethics*, the authorized entity is obligated to charge fees for such services that are fair, reasonable and commensurate to the required time and effort.

If there is work that is being transferred from one authorized entity to another under conditions beyond the control of a preceding entity, additional notification provisions to the predecessor, entity, authority having jurisdiction and Council apply to the successor entity.

UNAUTHORIZED USE OF SEAL

Only authorized entities as defined under the *Architects Act* are entitled to engage in the practice of architecture and licensed interior design.

Authorized entities assume full responsibility for the inherent design represented in the documents which they seal.

This means that the seal of an authorized entity is NOT for sale.

The *General Regulation* (Section 36) and the *Code of Conduct* (Section 12) expressly prohibits an authorized entity from enabling or participating in unauthorized practice.

Applying a seal to a document prepared under conditions where the professional responsibilities have not been completely fulfilled violates the underlying intent of the *Architects Act*, *General Regulation*, *Bylaws* and *Code of Ethics* and can be characterized as "selling one's seal". Such practices are not in the interest of the public and diminishes the value of the profession. The AAA will actively pursue those

members who participate in such practices and impose sanctions, including possible reprimand, fines and/or suspension of those found guilty of participating in such activities. The activities of unauthorized practitioners are subject to legal injunction.

Members, institutions, municipal authorities and interested members of the public at large should not accept this practice and are encouraged to report any examples of alleged unauthorized practice to the AAA for immediate review.

WHEN TO APPLY A SEAL

The seal is primarily intended for documents in connection with professional architectural or licensed interior design services for the construction or alteration of a building.

Normally, the name of the firm and signature of the authorized entity, without the seal, is sufficient for reports, correspondence, or other documents to demonstrate the practice is accepting professional responsibility.

However, in some instances, authorities will insist on the authorized entity affixing its seal and signature to reports and certificates and this is left to member's discretion, however, the seal should only be applied if the documents are prepared by or under the personal supervision, direction and control of the authorized entity.

An authorized entity's professional seal should not be confused with a corporate business seal issued through the Alberta Corporate Registry, which is intended for entirely different purposes such as Client/Architect Agreements, letters or other contracts executed under 'corporate' seal.

Documents that shall be sealed and where applicable, qualified

- ▶ Plans, drawings, specifications, reports or documents that are complete and intended for construction
- ▶ Documents issued to authorities having jurisdiction for development permit and building permit purposes
- ▶ Documents issued for construction to the contractor and owner including the contract set and contract changes
- ▶ Sketches, drawings and accompanying site instructions, change orders or change directives that alter a document that has already been sealed or is to be added to the contract documents

Documents that shall not be sealed

- ▶ Documents not prepared by or under the personal supervision, direction and control of an authorized entity including "progress" drawings used for internal coordination purposes or for discussion between the Architect or Licensed Interior Designer, client and consultants.
- ▶ Incomplete documents such as drafts or preliminary documents
- ▶ Record Drawings as prepared by the Architect of Record
- ▶ As-built documents as produced by the contractor or based on information provided by others
- ▶ Blank drawing sheets, blank letters of assurance or blank schedules for authorities having jurisdiction
- ▶ Competition documents where anonymity is a requirement

- ▶ Legal documents requiring a corporate seal

Documents of a professional nature that shall be sealed and where applicable, qualified

- ▶ Any item prepared in its entirety under the personal supervision, direction and control of the authorized entity as verification that the requirements under the legislation are met and that the document or other instruments of service can be used for the construction of a building are to be sealed.
- ▶ Documents prepared for approval purposes under seal may be **qualified as incomplete**. Occasionally, a client or approval authority may request a seal to be affixed to certain documents that do not represent a final design ready for construction; such as preliminary design, design development, pretender drawings, specifications, reports or development permit applications. The AAA requirement for seal is intended to provide confirmation that professional involvement is being provided where it is required per the *Architects Act* and under the *Alberta Building Code*. This is consistent with Bylaw 9.111(1)¹ and will assist all authorities having jurisdiction to recognize professional involvement when it is provided. In such instances, the specific purpose of the documents must be specifically identified. Disclaimers such as **Draft, Preliminary, or Not for Construction**, must also be utilized.
- ▶ Reports and documents that are not construction documents, but which are complete and of a professional nature (contracts, certificates, etc.) are to be issued under seal.

WHO MAY APPLY A SEAL

The *Architects Act* defines who is entitled to apply the seal under its definition of an “authorized entity” and the “practice of Architecture” and in Part 1 – Scope of Practice:

2(1) Except as otherwise provided in the Act, no person except an authorized entity shall engage in the practice of architecture.

The *Architects Act* and *Bylaws* require that a seal be applied by an authorized entity within the acceptable practice arrangements as defined in Part 2 of the *Architects Act General Regulation*:

- ▶ A registered architect or licensed interior designer as sole practitioner or partner of a firm
- ▶ A registered architect or licensed interior designer as a continuing employee or shareholder of a corporation
- ▶ A registered architect as a continuing employee or partner in a joint engineering and architecture firm
- ▶ A visiting project architect
- ▶ A restricted practitioner
- ▶ A visiting project licensed interior designer

The following identifies the proper usage of the seal and accompanying permits as applicable, by each of these authorized entities:

Registered Architect

- ▶ Personal seal, signed by the architect with date of sealing

Licensed Interior Designer

- ▶ Personal seal, signed by the licensed interior designer with date of sealing

Architect Corporation

- ▶ Personal seal of the registered architect, signed by the architect with date of sealing
- ▶ Permit stamp issued by the AAA

Licensed Interior Design Corporation

- ▶ Personal seal of the licensed interior designer, signed by the licensed interior designer with date of sealing
- ▶ Permit stamp issued by the AAA

Joint Architecture and Engineering Firm

- ▶ Personal seal of the registered architect, signed by the architect with date of sealing
- ▶ Permit stamp issued by the AAA

Visiting Project Architect

- ▶ Personal seal of the VPA issued in the jurisdiction where licensed to practice, signed by the architect with date of sealing
- ▶ VPA stamp issued by the AAA including name of collaborating Alberta architect

Restricted Practitioner

- ▶ Personal engineering seal signed by the RP with date of sealing
- ▶ RP permit stamp as issued by AAA
- ▶ RP permit stamp as issued by APEGA
- ▶ RP certificate of authorization issued by Joint Board of Practice

Visiting Project Interior Designer

- ▶ Personal seal of the collaborating licensed interior designer, signed by the licensed interior designer with date of sealing

Note: Sole proprietors and partnerships of architects and / or licensed interior designers with the AAA are assigned personal identification registration numbers. However, for these authorized entities, it is only the signature and personal seal that is currently required to be affixed to external documents of a professional nature. The “permit stamp” as identified in this practice bulletin refers to either the architect’s corporation stamp or other stamps with a corresponding permit or license number. This stamp is to be affixed alongside the signature and personal seal for corporations and other structured entities as described above, in accordance with the Bylaws.

Where the authorized entity applying the seal is also the representative of the entity applying the permit stamp, simultaneous electronic encryption of documents containing both the seal and permit stamp can be arranged when an electronic authentication account is used. (See Approved Authentication Methods / Notarius.)

OWNERSHIP, SAFEKEEPING AND RETURN

The profession of architecture and licensed interior design is self-governing, guided by right-to-practice and right-to-title provisions of the *Architects Act*. Seals and stamps remain the property of and under

the regulatory control of the AAA and are therefore issued on loan to members for their use. As the rightful owner of the seal, the AAA requires any architect or licensed interior designer who ceases to be a member to promptly return the seal/stamp to the AAA.

Seals and stamps should always be kept safely secured. Members should advise the AAA promptly if the seal is lost or stolen and return a damaged seal for replacement. The seal must not be altered for any reason.

It is recommended that only certified complete copies of documents, either hard copy or electronic, be sealed, not original source files that can be subjected to future manipulation and change. Exact duplicate sealed copies should be retained by the architect as required for contract and record keeping purposes.

APPROVED AUTHENTICATION METHODS

The *Architects Act Bylaws* describes the method by which physical, hard copy, printed documented shall be authenticated or certified. This manual authentication process requires the seal, signature and date to be manually applied to each sheet being authenticated or certified in accordance with Section 9.111(2):

9.111(2) A seal or stamp must be accompanied by the signature of the authorized entity to whom it is issued and the date on which it is applied. The seal or stamp must be produced solely for the purpose of the project documents to which it is applied as evidence that the documents were prepared under the direct supervision and control of the authorized entity.

Each portion of the manual certification method including the seal, signature and date must be applied each time a document is certified in accordance with Section 9.9(2) of the *Bylaws*:

9.9(2) each time the stamp is used:

- (a) It shall be stamped over the signature of the restricted practitioner whose stamp it is; or*
- (b) The restricted practitioner whose stamp it is shall sign over the stamp, so that the stamp and signature are combined.*

This means that no portion of the manual authentication image that includes the seal, signature and date may be included as part of a digital file from which the printed document may have been produced.

Subsequent to the proclamation of the *Electronic Transactions Act* in Alberta, the AAA also accepts the digital or electronic authentication of documents as an acceptable equivalent to the manual sealing method only when applied utilizing the methods outlined in this practice bulletin.

Electronic authentications are created through the inclusion of a mathematically - encrypted security tag that is embedded within a digital document at the time of authentication and which concurrently locks it down to prevent any further digital modifications to occur.

The application of the encrypted electronic tag is controlled through an electronic that relies upon a variety of security codes and passwords and which remain at all times under the exclusive control of the document authenticator. While the image that appears as part of an electronic document may be adjusted, the security aspects of the digital authentication are essentially achieved through the encryption process and verified through a digital certificate that can only be viewed in the digital

document and which is maintained and managed in a digital vault by a trusted digital certificates management organization.

When properly applied, the digital certificate will be electronically associated with information about the authenticator which is directly referenced to the information maintained in a digital certificates vault.

The certificate will report details about the authenticator and authentication date to the readers of the electronic document. A properly applied digital certificate will also report any attempts to modify or tamper with the authenticated document that may be attempted by anyone other than the authenticator. A digital signature supported by an encrypted certification is the equivalent of the combined seal, hand signature and date as applied through the manual authentication process.

While various commercial products and services are available to create electronic or digital signatures and certificates, the AAA reserves the right to approve the specific methods of electronic authentication that may be used by its members as part of its responsibility to manage the issuance of seals.

The AAA has secured the use of electronic authentication technology and secured certificate vaulting services of Notarius, a not-for-profit certification provider founded by the Quebec Society of Notaries Public. Notarius provides the technology and security services through which professionals can sign, seal and deliver electronic documents safely and in a manner that complies with the AAA's regulatory requirements regarding the application of a seal. Notarius is also used by the Alberta Professional Engineers and Geophysicists Association (APEGA).

Currently, Notarius is the only approved electronic certification technology approved for use by the Association. Permission for Notarius to store digital seal information of AAA members is provided at the sole discretion of the AAA.

The image included as part of the digital certification process shall replicate that which results through the manual certification process and must employ the full security features offered through the digital certification process. The image that is represented on the electronic documents as part of the digital signature process may be created through a combination of scanned images to the exact size, format and proportions as the manual seal only when being applied through the approved electronic authentication process.

MEDIA CONVERSION

It is important to note that while both manual and electronic forms of authentication are recognized as acceptable methods by the AAA, the manual authentication method only applies to physical, hard copy, printed documents while the digital certification method only applies to electronic documents.

Just as facsimiles of an original seal, signature and date marking when utilizing the manual documents authentication method, when documents are converted from one media to another, the authentication no longer applies. Therefore, print documents that have been manually sealed, signed, dated and then scanned to a digital format are no longer recognized as an authenticated document. Similarly, the print

format of an electronic document embedded with a valid digital signature is not considered to be a valid authenticated document.

DOCUMENT STORAGE

The average lifespan of an electronic document has been reported at between three to five years which

may be less than the time in which professional accountability or legal liability issues may arise. While the AAA has taken steps to address considerations of security, revocation, and authentication/verification, it is the responsibility of each member to address storage issues. Members are advised to consult with legal and information technology professionals to determine appropriate methods for protecting and storing electronically - authenticated records.

OBTAINING AN ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATE

Members can purchase a license to use a unique certificate that they control through the use of secure passwords. A member wishing to apply for an electronic certificate may do so by visiting the AAA section on the Notarius website and following the directions set out on that page. The website address is www.Notarius.com/AAA.

TEN REQUIREMENTS FOR USE OF A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE²

1. Electronic signature, seal and delivery is permissible if and only if a AAA member with current authority to sign and seal documents under the Architects Act, Regulation and Bylaws acquires an electronic certificate issued by Notarius under the authority of the AAA.
2. No document bearing one or more images of a member's professional seal and/or signature in electronic form is valid unless that member applies his/her Notarius/AAA digital certificate to that document.
3. Members must use their digital certificate issued by Notarius under authority of the AAA for all documents requiring their signature and seal which they intend to sign/seal and or deliver electronically.
4. Members must not disclose any personal codes or marks enabling any other persons to use their digital certificate, including passwords, activation codes or verification codes used for identification purposes. Failure to comply with this obligation may result in the immediate revocation of the certificate by either or both the AAA and Notarius.
5. Members must inform Notarius and the AAA as soon as possible of any changes to their contact information including email address.
6. Members must use their computer equipment securely, remembering to close their certificate software or log out of the application before leaving their workstation unattended
7. Members must inform Notarius and the AAA immediately if they believe the confidentiality/security/integrity of their certificate has been compromised.
8. Certificate and software licenses for the certificate technology cannot be sold, transferred, distributed or otherwise assigned without the express written permission of Notarius and the AAA.
9. Members shall not attempt to apply a certificate if it has been cancelled, suspended or revoked. This will result in disciplinary action being taken by the AAA against the member in question.
10. Members shall follow the destruction method specified by Notarius if their certificate is cancelled, suspended, revoked or otherwise is no longer valid or in use.

HOW DIGITAL CERTIFICATES WORK IN THE "REAL WORLD"

This practice bulletin deals primarily with the rules and rationale for digital certificates. It is not intended as an instruction manual on how to use and apply the technology. Notarius has technical support personnel who can assist via telephone as well as instructions and manuals on their website. This said a few words on how the technology actually works is included in this bulletin as some additional rules and considerations need to be highlighted.

The Notarius technology is, essentially, applied is as follows:

- ▶ A person will create a document in any one of a number of different software applications. Reports, memos, letters and other such documents are typically created in any one of a number of commercially available word processing programs. These programs will typically also allow a person to create a signature block in which an image of a signature and professional seal can be applied.
- ▶ Once the document is created and the images are applied, it must then be converted to PDF format. It is not necessary to have Adobe Acrobat (in any of its versions) to use the technology. The software package provided by Notarius contains an application which allows users to convert their documents into PDF format. If the user does have Adobe Acrobat Pro, it can be configured to use the Notarius digital certificate to certify the document. Notarius technical support can assist in configuration if the user is unfamiliar with the digital certificate set-up in Adobe. The advantage of applying the certificate within Adobe itself is that the certificate block is more customizable than if the user were to use the Consigno application provided through Notarius. For "one-off" documents, this may be the preferable option. If, however, the user needs to certify a large batch of documents (like individual files for each sheet in a package of drawings as discussed later in this note), the Consigno application is likely the better option as it allows for batch "signing" capabilities.
- ▶ Once the PDF file is created, it is then opened in the Notarius provided software application (called Consigno) and the digital certificate is applied. At this point the document becomes a valid electronic "signed and sealed" document.

The same principles apply to drawings created by CAD and related software applications. Images of a member's professional seal and signature can be placed in each of the title blocks after which the document is then converted to PDF format and the digital certificate is applied.

What is the best way to proceed when issuing a set of drawings, often running into tens if not hundreds of pages? Creating a single document with one electronic certificate, or creating multiple documents each with its own certificate? Either approach is acceptable as long as the following rules are respected:

- ▶ Every person receiving a document bearing a member's signature and/or seal must be able to tell from that document that:
 - » It is the current document
 - » It can be relied upon
 - » If it is a revision of one or more previous documents, what those antecedent documents were and what changes have been made

The above applied in both the physical and electronic worlds. In the electronic world, any document to which a member's digital certificate is applied must contain information (either in the title block or in a tracking schedule) which indicates whether the document is the first issue or a revision. If the document is a revision, information on how that revision relates to its predecessor documents is also included.

It is recommended that a disclaimer similar to the following be included on all authenticated digital documents which may be converted to other media formats to mitigate potential liabilities resulting from potential document media conversions that may occur outside the control of the electronic document authenticator:

This document has been authenticated utilizing an encrypted digital signature and certificate

technology as authorized by the Alberta Association of Architects. The embedded digital certificate within the electronic document is the sole and exclusive item which can be utilized by the reader to verify the authenticity of the electronic document. The digital image of the seal, hand-written signature is a representation of the digital signature and certificate and is included for convenience to indicate that the electronic document contains a digital encrypted signature capable of being independently verified through the viewing of the document in its original electronic format only. The document authenticator accepts no responsibility for documents that are converted from their original electronic media format. It is the sole responsibility of the user or reader to verify the authenticity of any of document that has been converted from its original digital media.

The document is then converted to PDF format and the digital certificate is applied.

The recommended (best practice) when dealing with a multi-page set of drawings is to create a separate PDF file for each drawing page. The Notarius technology allows for bulk/batch conversion of such files as well as bulk/batch certificate application. This method is similar to what happens in the physical world where a person has to physically apply the seal and physically sign each page. The advantage here is that the process is a lot quicker and easier in the electronic world. The individual digitally signed PDF files for each drawing can then be "bundled" together in a single "zip" or other archive file for transmission or archiving as a single file containing many individual PDF drawing files.

The main advantage to this method, suitable for smaller sets of documents where changes are not anticipated, is to convert all of them into a single PDF format file to which the digital certificate is applied. The advantage of this method is that the certificate only needs to be applied once. The disadvantages are:

- ▶ A control sheet must be included detailing whether the set is original, whether it is a revised set, as well as each and every revision made to the set.
- ▶ Each page of the bundle must include wording indicating that it is part of a complete set and can only be trusted if the set remains together; and
- ▶ The extra image that appears when the digital certificate is applied will only appear once in the set.

NOTES

¹Bylaw Section 9.111(1) states:

Control of Seals and Stamps

9.111(1) A seal or stamp issued to an authorized entity under section 20 of the Act must at all times remain under the direct control of the authorized entity and must be applied by the authorized entity or by a person acting under the immediate and direct control of the authorized entity **to all plans, specifications, reports or documents of a professional nature** that have been authored by the authorized entity or which have been prepared under the supervision of the authorized entity and for which the authorized entity assumes professional responsibility.

²The Alberta Association of Architects published a Guide to Notarius and its Use – A Companion Document to PB-15 which can be found at: [PB-15 Companion Document](#)

Revised: May 2018

Approved by Council: May 10, 2018

Practice bulletins are issued by The Alberta Association of Architects as a practice resource or as general interpretations of the requirements in the *Architects Act*, the *General Regulation* under the Act, and the AAA Bylaws. Bulletins should be read in conjunction with the Act, *General Regulation* and Bylaws and in no way supersede these documents. Bulletins are not intended to be and are not legal advice to the members of the AAA nor to the public/client. Members and the public should consult their own legal, income tax or financial advisors as to the application of the *Architects Act* and *General Regulation* in specific circumstances.