

SQA Advisory: No. 5

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TOPIC: Certificates without an accreditation *or approval body* mark:

Introduction:

The integrity of the third-party certification is dependent upon a system of checks and balances. This process begins with a national government granting authority to an organization (typically one per country) to accredit other organizations to issue certifications. This forms the following hierarchy: 1) government; 2) accreditation body; 3) certification body (registrar). (*A variation for "2" is a recognized approval body.*) In the case of accreditation (*or approval*) bodies and certification bodies, each has a unique logo, referred to as their "mark." The presence of this mark on certificates provides assurance to the multiple stakeholders that the accreditation and certification actions have been conducted in accordance with internationally recognized requirements, and that the certificates have merit.

Discussion:

In recent months, we have received many requests from organizations for SQA to assume their certification. Most of these organizations believe that their management system received certification from an accredited registrar. Part of our certificate assumption "due diligence" is to ask for a copy of each organization's current certificate. With increasing frequency, we are seeing certificates that do not have any mark (logo) from a recognized accreditation body, e.g., RvA or RAB, even though the registrar may, in fact, be accredited. As previously stated, the presence of an accreditation body mark on a certificate provide assurance that the registrar has executed their assessment activities in accordance with internationally recognized requirements, such as ISO Guides 62 (QMS) and 66 (EMS), and that their practices and related records are subject to periodic examination by one or more accreditation bodies. When a certificate is void of an accreditation mark, the various stakeholders have no assurance that the registrar has conducted its assessments in accordance with these requirements. Consequently, the certificate has very limited, even questionable, value.

SQA Position:

We are cautioning our clients that accept certificates as proof of certification to closely examine them to verify whether or not they have an accreditation (*or approval body*) mark. (This will be in addition to the mark/logo of the registrar.) Those that do not are, at the least suspect, and may even be bogus.