

Terrestrial Animal Health Standards
Commission Report

October 2008

CHAPTER 5.2.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Article 5.2.1.

Protection of the professional integrity of the certifying veterinarian

Certification should be based on the highest possible ethical standards, the most important of which is that the professional integrity of the certifying veterinarian must be respected and safeguarded according to Chapters 3.1. and 3.2.

It is essential not to include in the requirements additional specific matters which cannot be accurately and honestly signed by a *veterinarian*. For example, these requirements should not include certification of an area as being free from non-notifiable *diseases* the occurrence of which the signing veterinarian is not necessarily informed about. Equally, to ask certification for events which will take place after the document is signed is unacceptable when these events are not under the direct control and supervision of the signing veterinarian.

Certification of freedom from *diseases* based on purely clinical freedom and *herd* history is of limited value. This is also true of *diseases* for which there is no specific diagnostic test, or the value of the test as a diagnostic aid is limited.

The note of guidance referred to in Article 5.1.1. is not only to inform the signing veterinarian but also to safeguard professional integrity.

Article 5.2.2.

Certifying veterinarians

Certifying veterinarians should:

1. be authorised by the *Veterinary Authority* of the *exporting country* to sign *international veterinary certificates*;
2. only certify matters that are within their own knowledge at the time of signing the certificate, or that have been separately attested by another competent party;
3. sign only at the appropriate time certificates that have been completed fully and correctly; where a certificate is signed on the basis of supporting documentation, the certifying veterinarian should be in possession of that documentation before signing;
4. have no conflict of interest in the commercial aspects of the *animals* or animal products being certified and be independent from the commercial parties.

Article 5.2.3.

Preparation of international veterinary certificates

Certificates should be drawn up in accordance with the following principles:

1. Certificates should be designed so as to minimize the potential for fraud including use of a unique identification number, or other appropriate means to ensure security. Paper certificates should bear the official identifier of the issuing *Veterinary Authority*. Each page of a multiple page certificate should bear the unique certificate number and a number indicating the number of the page out of the total number of pages. Electronic certification procedures should include equivalent safeguards.
2. They should be written in terms that are as simple, unambiguous and easy to understand as possible, without losing their legal meaning.
3. If so required, they should be written in the language of the *importing country*. In such circumstances, they should also be written in a language understood by the certifying veterinarian.
4. They should require appropriate identification of *animals* and animal products except where this is impractical (e.g. *day-old birds*).
5. They should not require a *veterinarian* to certify matters that are outside his/her knowledge or which he/she cannot ascertain and verify.
6. Where appropriate, they should be accompanied, when presented to the certifying veterinarian, by notes of guidance indicating the extent of enquiries, tests or examinations expected to be carried out before the certificate is signed.
7. Their text should not be amended except by deletions which must be signed and stamped by the certifying veterinarian. The signature and stamp must be in a colour different to that of the printing of the certificate.
8. Replacement certificates may be issued by a *Veterinary Authority* to replace certificates that have been, for example, lost, damaged, contain errors, or where the original information is no longer correct. These duplicates should be provided by the issuing authority and ~~These must~~ be clearly marked to indicate that they are replacing the original certificate. A replacement certificate should reference the number and the issue date of the certificate that it supersedes. The superseded certificate should be cancelled and where possible, returned to the issuing authority.
9. Only original certificates are acceptable.

Article 5.2.4.

Electronic certification

1. Certification may be provided by electronic documentation sent directly from the *Veterinary Authority* of the *exporting country* to the *Veterinary Authority* of the *importing country*. Such systems also normally provide an interface with the commercial organisation marketing the *commodity* for provision of information to the certifying authority. The certifying veterinarian must have access to all information such as *laboratory* results and *animal identification* data.

2. Electronic certificates may be in a different format but should carry the same information as conventional paper certificates.
3. The *Veterinary Authority* must have in place systems for the security of electronic certificates against access by unauthorised persons or organisations.
4. The certifying veterinarian must be officially responsible for the secure use of his/her electronic signature.