ASTTBC Professional Seal Guideline

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Introduction

This document guides registered ASTTBC professionals on the use of their digital signatures and ASTTBC professional Seals.

The application of a Seal to a technical or professional document is indicative of professional responsibility and due diligence in the provision of technical services. The Seal also serves as a measure of registrants' commitment to standards of practice and is a symbol of reliance for the public. Registrants must be aware of the legal and ethical implications of using the professional Seal for their work. The Seal must only be affixed to documents that have been prepared by the Registrant or under the direct supervision of the Registrant or prepared by another person in circumstances where the Registrant has thoroughly reviewed the documents and accepted professional responsibility for the work.

ASTTBC governs the issuance and use of the Seal. However, a Registrant is required to stay informed of all applicable legislation, jurisdictional requirements, or workplace limitations on the use of the professional Seal. It is important to determine whether any legal restrictions in place limit the use of an AScT stamp/seal to authenticate the document in question and if there is a requirement for the application of a specific professional Seal.

1.0 Defined Terms

The following definitions are specific to this guide. These words and terms are capitalized throughout the document.

Term	Definition
Act	***Professional Governance Act***, SBC 2018, c. 47
ASTTBC	Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of BC
Bylaws	Bylaws of the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC made under the Act.
Digital Certificate Provider	A third party approved by ASTTBC to issue a Digital Certificate to Registrants of ASTTBC.
Digital Seal	A Seal is used to authenticate electronic documents. A valid digital Seal is made up of two components: the complete digital signature applied to the electronic document itself as well as a digital certificate.
Digital Certificate	A certificate issued to a Registrant by a Digital Certificate Provider that validates an electronic document proving the authenticity, origin, and integrity of the document.

Document	A document includes, but is not limited to, the following in any digital or hard copy format: letters, reports, tags, labels, designs, video recordings, memos, drawings, plans, specifications, calculations, technical and professional opinions on inspection and test results, estimates, quotations, maps or mapping, directions or instruction and general engineering technology and/or applied science advice offered or given.
Guide	A guide is a professional practice document published by the ASTTBC in accordance with the Act, Regulation, and Bylaws. Guides define the minimum standard of practice and standards of conduct and competence required by registrants of ASTTBC.
Practising Registrant	Practising registrant means a person registered with ASTTBC and who is permitted to engage in applied science and engineering technology practice but does not include trainees, students, honorary Registrants, retired Registrants, non-practising Registrants, inspectors in training, associate Registrants, graduate technicians, and graduate technologists.
Registrant	A registrant of the Applied Science Technologist and Technicians of BC who is registered in the following classes: a. Applied Science Technologist; b. Certified Technician; c. Registered Technical Specialist.
Registrar	Appointed officer of ASTTBC responsible for carrying out the duties, powers, and responsibilities set out in the PGA, Regulation, and Bylaws.
Regulated Practice	As defined in the PGA and Regulation, regulated practice is the carrying on of a professional by a registrant of ASTTBC, which for this guide is the practice of applied science technology.
Regulation	Applied Science Technologists and Technicians Regulation, BC Reg 12/2021
Seal (Noun)	A “seal” is a distinguishing mark of an individual Registrant that indicates to a recipient that the documents and contents of that document were prepared by, or under the direct supervision of, the registrant.
Seal (Verb)	To affix or apply a seal of an ASTTBC registered professional along with a date and digital signature to a document.

Temporary Registrant	A temporary registrant is a practising registrant of another regulatory body governing applied science and engineering technology practice in a jurisdiction approved by the credentials committee. A temporary registrant may only engage in applied science and engineering technology practice on the terms approved by the credential committee.

2.0 Overview

The objective of this guideline is to help registrants understand the proper use of a Seal including its application and acquisition. Registrants in good standing are eligible to affix a Seal to authenticate work documents prepared by them or under their direct supervision. The guideline addresses the following areas:

- Purpose of the ASTTBC Professional Seal
- Types of Seals
- Components of a Valid Seal
- Acquisition and Maintenance of the Seal
- Standards for Professional Seal Usage

2.1 Purpose of the Professional Seal

A Seal is a formal confirmation from the Registrant, the professional, that the document can be relied upon and used by others for the purposes intended. The primary purpose of the Seal is to verify and validate the authenticity and integrity of a message or document that contains the Registrant's work, opinions, and professional judgments.

Applying a Seal to a work document is a serious matter and an improper application can give rise to an issue of liability and may have legal consequences. When applying a Seal to a work document, the Registrant is confirming:

- the Registrant is assuming professional responsibility for the Document(s) and its contents;
- that the Document(s) meets all applicable laws, codes, standards, and all applicable professional guidelines;
- that the Document(s) meets all professional requirements[1];
- the Registrant is qualified, competent, and able to take responsibility for the work that has been authenticated;
- the Registrant is in good standing with ASTTBC; and
- the Registrant exercised independent judgment, free from undue influences, when reviewing the document and applying the professional Seal.

Once a Seal has been applied to a document it becomes legally binding.
A Seal provides professional assurances as to the authenticity and integrity of a Document. It does not provide any warranty or guarantee of accuracy. The Seal also does not indicate insurance for the contents or usage of that Document.

[1]Professional requirements include, but are not limited to, the PGA, Bylaws, the Code, Professional Practice Guidelines and Advisories, and Standards of Practice that may be in place.

A Seal indicates that others can be assured that the contents, including opinions or statements, have been provided to meet ASTTBC's standards of conduct and competence.

2.2 Types of Seals

The requirements for authenticating documents apply equally to electronic and physical documents as defined in this guide. Two types of Seals are issued and accepted for use by ASTTBC.

2.2.1 Physical Seals

A physical ink stamp with an image of the Registrant's name and identification number, issued by ASTTBC to Practising Registrants is used to manually authenticate physical documents. The Seal is applied along with the Practising Registrant's signature and date.

Additionally, a Registrant may choose to purchase a long-reach embosser Seal to manually authenticate professional Documents.

2.2.2 Digital Seals

A Registrant may authenticate an electronic Document using a Digital Seal and Digital Certificate. Digital Seals ensure the authenticity and integrity of an electronic Document. A Digital Seal helps prove the signee's identity, the signee's registration status with ASTTBC, the registration category, and the date and time the Document was signed. An accompanying Digital Certificate ensures that the Document has not been altered since it was finalized or completed.

If technical opinions and decisions are shared electronically, the electronic Document can be authenticated through the use of Digital Seal. Furthermore, email records with professional opinions and decisions can also be converted to PDF and secured with a Digital Seal.

Digital Seals should not be mistaken for a scanned image of the physical Seal. When an electronic Document has been authenticated through a Digital Seal, the electronic file is considered the original document while any printed reproductions are considered copies.

2.3 Components of a Valid Seal

For a Seal to be considered valid, three main components must be present:

1. Application of a personalized Seal to the Document that includes the Registrant's name, Registrant identification number, and ASTTBC designation.
2. Registrant's signature; and
3. The date of Seal application.

Failure to provide all three of these components will render the Seal application invalid.

Figure 1: Samples of ASTTBC Professional Seals

- For electronic Documents authenticated through a Digital Seal, in addition to the three aforementioned components, these Documents also require:
  - A Digital Certificate issued by an ASTTBC-approved Digital Certificate Supplier.

2.3.1 Restrictions and Endorsements

Registrants with any restrictions or endorsements for the type of work and Documents that they can authenticate will have these indicated on the Seal itself. For a full listing of restrictions and endorsements, refer to Appendix A.

3.0 Acquisition and Maintenance of the Seal

3.1 Eligibility

Seals, both physical and digital, may only be used by practising or temporary Registrants in good standing.

Technologists and Technicians in training, students, honorary Registrants, retired Registrants, non-practising Registrants, associate Registrants, graduate technicians, and graduate technologists are not eligible to acquire or use a Seal.

The right to use the Seal is a privilege granted by ASTTBC under the PGA and Bylaws. A Seal may only be issued by ASTTBC in accordance with the Bylaws. Seals must not be acquired, reproduced, or otherwise from any source not approved by ASTTBC.

While all practising and temporary Registrants in good standing may be eligible to obtain a Seal, it is up to the individual Registrant to decide if there is an ongoing need to obtain a Seal. Needs may be based upon the nature of their work, requirements of their employer, and/or requirements as outlined under the laws, the PGA, and Bylaws.

3.2 Ownership of the Seal

The Seal remains the property of ASTTBC and must be returned immediately upon request of the Registrar[2].

3.3 Securing and Maintaining the Seal

Any Seal that is issued to a Registrant must remain under that person's direct control at all times. The Registrant is responsible for securing the Seal in a manner so that it may not be accessed or used by any other person at any time. This requirement applies equally to both physical and digital seals.

3.4 Obtaining a Registrant Seal

Requests to acquire a Seal must be sent directly to ASTTBC. To order a Seal:

1. log on to their Registrant portal and place an order via the member toolkit, or
2. email info@asttbc.org to receive a Professional Seal Order and Declaration Form and further guidance on how to acquire a Seal.

For Digital Seals, ASTTBC has approved the following Digital Certificate Supplier(s):
Notarius

Registrants holding a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner or Registered Fire Protection Technician designation are required to have a Seal to fulfill their professional duties. Individuals applying to register in one of these designations will automatically have a Seal application processed as part of their Registrant application package with ASTTBC.

3.5 Fees

Fees for acquiring a Seal can be found in Schedule C of the Bylaws. Fees relating to the re-issue of lost or stolen Seals and related services are also outlined in the aforementioned section of the Bylaws.

[2] ASTTBC Bylaws – Part X: Stamps and Seals, Section 83.2

3.6 Stolen, lost or damaged Seals

Lost or stolen Seals must be reported immediately to the Registrar. If a Registrant misplaces the Seal, or reports it as stolen, ASTTBC will require a notarized affidavit stating what happened to the Seal.

Damaged Seals must not be used to authenticate documents. In such cases, the Registrar must be notified promptly and arrangements by the Registrant should be made to obtain a replacement Seal. Damaged Seals must be returned to the Registrar for destruction.

Any fees relating to lost, stolen, and replaced Seals are to be paid for by the Registrant, including, but not limited to, affidavit fees, charges for issuing a new Seal, fines, and administrative fees for issuing new Registrant identification.

4.0 Standard for Professional Seal Usage

4.1 Documents requiring a Seal

Section 84 the Bylaws, outlines when Registrants are authorized to affix their professional Seal to Documents. These Documents include, but are not limited to, plans, drawings, reports, specifications, or other documents that may require a Seal, either as required by law, ASTTBC practice guides, or other practice quality assurance requirements set forth by ASTTBC. Examples of other documents that may require a Seal include maps, lab analysis, specifications, design and field notes, and official estimates. Letters may not be stamped unless used as a report or provide a professional opinion or judgment.

Registrants may seal technical documents, prepared by them, that have been specifically requested by a client or an Authority having Jurisdiction (AHJ).

While companies may not require the application of Seal for in-house submissions, the onus falls on the registrant to be aware of any specific legal and employee limitations in place.

In practice, a Seal should be applied to Documents that are:

- intended to be consumed or relied upon by an external party;
- final drafts;
- drafts produced, or overseen by the Registrant, that are intended to be included as part of a formal submission or application to another party;
- advising of a Registrants identification of a hazard, providing a recommendation to mitigate the risk of a hazard occurring, or specifying actions taken to mitigate the risk;
- formally stating a registrant's professional opinion and recommendation on a matter; or
- Document(s) that indicate the Registrant has provided direct supervision to another Registrant and takes responsibility for the work that they have produced.

For every Document that will be produced by a Registrant, the Registrant needs to be aware if their work will be done under the direct supervision of another professional. Documents completed under the direct supervision of another professional will be reviewed and authenticated under that professional's Seal.

To avoid confusion around authentication and professional responsibility, only one Seal should be applied to a Document.

In cases where Documents are produced in tandem with other professional Registrants, where each Registrant provides specialized expertise that is beyond the competency of the others, each Registrant should authenticate and apply their Seal to their appropriate section of the document.

4.2 Documents not requiring a Seal

Documents that are issued and produced within an organization but are not intended to be relied upon by others do not require authentication by a Seal. These types of Documents typically include preliminary drafts and notes.

Materials prepared for information or research such as articles, presentations, and technical papers for journals are not required to be sealed.

Documents that a Registrant reviewed, but were not produced by the Registrant, should not be authenticated with a Seal.

In situations where work is completed under the direct supervision of another Registrant or professional (such as a Professional Engineer), the Document should be authenticated and sealed by the supervising professional.

4.3 Restrictions on Seal Usage

Registrants are prohibited from charging a fee or being remunerated for simply applying their Seal to a document.

In addition, Registrants must comply with the Code and not use the Seal in a manner that is improper or unethical. Examples of improper or unethical application of a Seal include, but are not limited to, affixing a Seal:

- as a form of payment or an extended favour;
- to Documents that the Registrant did not produce or review;
- to Documents that are not within the scope of the Registrant's level of endorsement or designation;
- to a blank document;
- to a Document that has been reproduced from another source; and
- to a work Document prepared by another Registrant where the work was not performed under the direct supervision of the Registrant.

Use of the Seal is strictly limited to documents describing work or containing information that is within the scope of practice defined by the registrant's category of registration, endorsements, educational qualifications, training, and experience.

Improper or unauthorized use of a professional Seal may result in disciplinary action or proceedings.

4.4 Where to apply a Seal

For Documents where only one Seal is applied, the Seal should be applied in a location within the Document that is near the author's title or the signature. This may be at the beginning or end of a document.

For documents where multiple Registrants are authenticating particular sections, the Seal of the authenticating Registrant should be applied at the beginning of each appropriate section.

Seals do not need to be applied to every page of a Document unless required by an AHJ.

4.5 How to Seal Documents

A Document can be authenticated manually by using a rubber ink stamp impression, or a metallic Seal embosser or can be authenticated electronically through a Digital Seal and corresponding Digital Certificate. As outlined in section 2.3, the registrant must include their handwritten signature and the date stamp or Seal was applied. The signature must always be included within the Seal or beside it. The professional Seal should be applied clearly and legibly.

Documents cannot be signed on behalf of the registrant and must be signed by the individual identified on the Seal.
If multiple revisions have been made to a document, it is preferred that the previously issued

Documents are retrieved and securely destroyed and updated Documents are issued with a new Seal. In cases where retrieving the originally issued Document, or all copies, is not feasible, then the Registrant must state the revision in the Document and authenticate with a new Seal. Registrants shall maintain an audit trail of revisions made to a Document.

Registrants who have applied their Seal to a Document in error must take all reasonable steps to retrieve the Document and have it securely destroyed.

4.6 Records Retention

Under the provisions of the PGA and Bylaws, a Registrant must maintain copies of the Documents that they have authenticated with their Seal. Document retention periods are dictated by legal requirements but may also be dictated by employer requirements or other guidelines. To reduce the risk of original, sealed Documents being copied and distributed, Registrants should ensure that their documents are secured under a document control and management system.

The minimum Document retention period prescribed under the Bylaws is 10 years[3] however it is best practice to retain records for at least 15[4] years. This does not include any additional requirements prescribed under Bylaws, guidelines, or common law. Registrants should maintain authenticated Documents for the period that includes the proposed lifespan of a product or service.

For quality assurance and audit purposes, it is best practice that the Registrants maintain a record of all Documents that they have authenticated with their Seal. This record should include the date the Seal was applied, the number of pages in the Document, the Document title, who the document was delivered to, how many copies were Sealed (for physically sealed documents), and the type of authentication method (Physical Seal or Digital Seal).

5.0 Additional Seal Guidelines

ASTTBC Registrants are required to comply with all other ASTTBC reference documents such as Standards of Practice or Guides to Professional Practice related to the discipline, specialty, or endorsement in which they are registered or endorsed.

ASTTBC does not authorize a registrant to carry on the activity of authenticating Documents in any manner not prescribed in this practice guideline. This includes but is not limited to the affixing of any Seal that has been physically reproduced or created electronically such as stick-on Seals, scanned images, or unauthorized digital and graphical reproduction.

In addition, Registrants are responsible for determining Seal requirements and/or protocols provided in federal provincial and municipal legislation. This includes Seal requirements for Documents intended for use in a jurisdiction outside of BC.

Reference & relevant documents

1. Professional Governance Act, SBC 2018, c. 47
2. Applied Science Technologists and Technicians Regulation, BC Reg 12/2021
3. ASTTBC Bylaws
4. ASTTBC Standards of Practice
5. ASTTBC Guides to Professional Practice

[3] ASTTBC Bylaws – Part XI: General, Section 87.1

[4] Limitation Act, S.B.C 2012, c.13.

Appendix A - ASTTBC Seal Restrictions and Endorsements

List of Seal Endorsements

Registered Fire Protection Technician

EX	Portable Fire Extinguishers
AL	Fire Alarm Systems
WA	Water-based Fire Protection Systems
EM	Unit Emergency Lighting
CO	Commercial Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning
SP-C	Special Fire Suppression Systems – Custom Engineering
SP-P	Special Fire Suppression Systems – Pre-engineered
FP	Stationary Fire Pumps
SM	Smoke Control Systems
GS	Generator Systems
VI	Fire Alarm System Verification

Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner

PL	Planner
IN	Installer
MP	Maintenance Provider
PIR	Private Inspector
RE	Restricted