

Use of Electronic Signatures

Reviewed Date		Number	IM0117
Revised Date		Approved Date	October 22, 2008

Introduction

The practice of creating an image of a personal signature to be used in electronic documents and agency correspondence may pose a risk to the individual. This form of e signature is very easy to copy and use for fraudulent purposes as a signature is a key piece of an individual's personal identity. For example, the signature may be copied and pasted into another document and thus make it appear that an individual has reviewed and approved that document.

Although showing an actual signature within an electronic document such as a memo or an e-mail may add a personal touch or level of authority to correspondence or documentation, it is important for the agency to ensure systems and processes are in place to protect personal identity.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define for Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health members, employees, students, volunteers, contractors the parameters within which electronic signatures may be used in agency documents.

Legislative Authority

N/A

Policy Definitions and Interpretation

For the purpose of this policy:

Electronic signatures can be a sound, symbol or process that signifies the intent to authorize. This includes a range of methods from the digital image of a handwritten signature; a digital code that is part of a PKI process; authentication processes that include user name and passwords or biometrics; and processes that require a user to put in specific information and then action a process that confirms the information and intent.

This policy focuses on the electronic signature that is a digital image of an individual's handwritten signature. This image may be in any digital format.

Policy

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health members, employees, students, and volunteers will refrain from using a digital image of an individual's handwritten signature in any electronic documentation created in the course of health unit business.

Where signatures are required on documents and correspondence as a symbol of authority for action or endorsement/approval of content by the owner of the signature, the original paper

copy of the official business record will contain the actual signature and the phrase “original signed by:” will be incorporated into the signature block of the electronic version of the document.

Where there is a defined business requirement for the use of a digital image of an individual’s handwritten signature:

- It will be preceded by investigation and documentation of the legal and regulatory requirements in relation to the business document being executed.
- The use of the technology or process by a person to incorporate, attach or associate the digital image of an individual’s handwritten signature to an electronic document is under the sole control of the signature owner.
- The electronic signature can be linked with an electronic document in such a way that it can be used to determine whether the electronic document has been changed since the electronic signature was incorporated in, attached to or associated with the electronic document.
- Procedures and parameters for the above will be clearly articulated and approved by the signature owner and the person to whom he/she reports.

All digital images of an individual’s handwritten signature will be maintained in a file with restricted access. The authority to use the signature must be requested and expressly given on each occasion.

Final Approval Signature: _____

Review/Revision History:

September 2010 Policy re-numbered, previous number A1.049