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Procedure for requesting equivalency of foreign certification

Québec's marine industry is currently facing major human resources challenges. The aging work force, massive departures for retirement in the medium term and the lack of a young generation are the direct consequence of a shortage of qualified, experienced candidates. This led CSMOIM to suggest seeking immigrants with marine qualifications.

In 2008, a study was conducted to understand and document the experiences and efforts of immigrants wishing to have Canada recognize their marine skills. Based on this study, CSMOIM developed an action plan to inform this target group of job opportunities in the Québec marine industry and the procedure for having their certification recognized. This is why I have devoted our 3rd regulations column to this question.

As you know, jobs for navigating personnel are regulated and require a certificate of competency issued by Transport Canada. Canada does not automatically recognize other countries' marine certification. Individuals with a certificate of competency issued by a foreign government wishing to work as navigating officers or marine engineering officers must apply to Transport Canada to have their equivalency recognized.

The procedure for obtaining recognition of equivalency for certification and sea time is as follows:

1. Have a valid certificate issued under STCW 95, without tonnage restrictions or voyage limitations. Sea time is checked. Near coastal time is not recognized.
2. Have official documents translated into French or English, with an official translator's seal.
3. Get Canadian citizenship or landed immigrant status with a permanent resident card.
4. Have Transport Canada analyze the file. Originals are required for file analysis (seaman's book, valid certificate, training certificates and pass marks).
5. Transport Canada will verify the certificate's authenticity through the country of origin.

After the file has been studied, a candidate usually needs to pass various exams and compulsory training sessions to obtain equivalency. These requirements are designed to ensure knowledge of the Canadian maritime system and features of navigation regulations specific to Canada. Usually, for a higher officer, the process takes about 8 to 12 months. A Ministère des Transports du Québec financial assistance program can provide financial support of 50% of the tuition fees for courses leading to officer certification.

In winter 2009, Transport Canada announced that it would no longer require candidates from countries having signed the STCW Convention (white list) to take certain training recognized by the international system over again. However, relaxing this requirement may be only temporary, given the changes anticipated to the STCW Convention as of June 2010.

Note that, when first employed in Canada, newcomers often begin one level lower than the certificate recognized by Transport Canada. During this time, they must prove their technical skills and, especially, their ability to adapt to the company's management style.