

OAA Professional Seal – Application (Usage)

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Summary

OAA Membersⁱ (members) must use the professional seal issued to them by the OAA in accordance with the rules governing the use of professional seals contained in the [Regulation](#), under the [Architects Act](#) (the *Act*). The member's seal and signature on a document represents that it was prepared in its entirety under the personal supervision and direction of a member or members.

The term architectural documents in this bulletin includes paper and electronic versions.

This bulletin elaborates on the regulations and procedures pertaining to the following:

- Documents that must or may be sealed;
- Physical OAA Seal application; and
- Digital OAA Seal application.

Background

In accordance with Regulation under the *Act*, certain documents prepared under the personal supervision and direction of a member must be sealed by a member.

Additionally, some items prepared in their entirety under the personal supervision and direction of a member may be sealed at the member's discretion. The OAA professional seal is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

Documents not prepared in their entirety under the personal supervision and direction of a member must not be sealed.

Also, competition documents where anonymity is a requirement should not be sealed nor should contracts or other documents requiring signature "under seal." A corporation that practises architecture has a corporate seal, which is not to be confused with the professional seal issued by the OAA to individual members. The corporate seal is on occasion used on legal documents such as contracts, leases, and other agreements.

Procedures

Documents that **MUST** be sealed:

Those documents accompanying applications for permits to construct or demolish (commonly called a building permit) or to be used to govern construction, enlargement, or alteration of a building as stated in the Regulation.

State the purpose of the sealed and signed documents to avoid misinterpretation that they are to be used for a purpose that was not intended; e.g. "Issued for SPA," "Issued for Permit," "Issued for Construction," etc.

In addition to the documents accompanying a building permit application, those documents that govern construction, enlargement, or alteration of a building include sketches and drawings accompanying 1) applications for site plan control, committee of adjustment, or rezoning, 2) other submissions to authorities having jurisdiction, or 3) site instructions, change orders, and change directives.

Drawings

- Apply your OAA professional seal and your signature on each drawing governing the construction, enlargement, or alteration of a building (which includes drawings submitted to authorities having jurisdiction.)

Project Manual

- Prepare a 'seal sheet' for the Project Manual or specifications book. Apply your seal and signature, and indicate those sections to which your seal and signature apply. Have consultants apply their professional seals and signatures to the 'seal sheet,' indicating the sections for which they are responsible.

Reports and Other Documents

- Apply your OAA professional seal and your signature on each report or other document governing the construction, enlargement, or alteration of a building (which includes alternative solutions reports and reports or other documents submitted to authorities having jurisdiction.) Have the consultants who are licensed professionals apply their seals and signatures to the reports or other documents, indicating which sections they have prepared.

Documents the MAY be sealed, provided the requirements for personal supervision and direction have been met:

Reports, Correspondence, Certificates

- The business name of the holder of the Certificate of Practice and signature of the member or authorized representative is generally sufficient on reports, correspondence, certificates, agreements, contracts, and other documents to demonstrate the architectural practice is accepting professional responsibility.
- In some instances, authorities will insist on the member affixing their seal and signature to reports and certificates. Sealing such documents is at the discretion of the member.

Other Documents

- If you choose to apply your seal and signature to documents other than those that must be sealed, state the purpose of the sealed and signed document to avoid misinterpretation that it is to be used for a purpose for which a seal is required.

Examples are:

1. Schematic and design development drawings that are marked as "Preliminary and Not for Construction."
2. Bid documents that are marked as "For Bid Purposes and Not for Construction."

Types of Seals

The OAA has two professional seal types: a physical seal and a digital seal. The OAA physical seal is purchased directly via the OAA Office of the Registrar. The OAA digital seal, which is a sealing process that embeds a digital certificate in the sealed documents, is acquired via subscription with [Notarius](#). The official issuance type will be on record and forms part of the OAA Register.

To complement the use of the professional physical and digital seal types, the OAA will provide the applicant with high-resolution images of their seal.

Physical OAA Seal – Manual Application

Members who have obtained a physical OAA Seal must follow the procedures set out below:

- Apply your professional seal, and your signature through the seal, on each document as required.
- If the manual seal is required to be returned to the Registrar, delete any photocopies or other copies or images of the seal. Advise the Registrar in writing that all versions or copies of the seal have been destroyed.

Physical OAA Seal – Seal Image Application

Members who choose to apply an image of their physical OAA seal may follow the procedures set out below:

- When you elect to apply an image of your seal and signature, you must ensure the electronic version is an exact replica of the imprint of the seal issued by the OAA.

- Do not reproduce the seal by redrawing, resizing, or creating a facsimile by other means.
- Similarly, if you choose to apply images of both seal and signature, apply your signature in a clear, crisp manner to the image.
- Before sharing files with consultants, owners, contractors, or any other party to the project, ensure the files no longer contain the seal and signature image(s). The seal information must be removed in its entirety before files are shared.
- When your seal image is required to be returned to the Registrar, delete the image files of the seal from every storage device, electronic file folders, etc.
- Advise the Registrar in writing that all images of the seal have been eliminated.
- Holders are reminded to maintain complete hard copies or PDFs of all their sealed drawings for your records before the seal image is deleted from your system.

Note: *Some authorities having jurisdiction may not accept an image of a signature on documents forming part of an application submission.*

Digital OAA Seal Application

The procedures set out below must be followed:

Once members have obtained a digital OAA seal, any document to which a member's seal must be applied will be signed and sealed via the Notarius authentication process, which will embed a digital certificate in the document(s). A digital seal certificate embeds the information, including the time and date in your documents.

A. Terminology

- “Digital signature/ Digital signing certificate” means cryptographically protected information in which the veracity of the certificate details is certified by a Certificate Authority.
- “Digital Seal” means digital signatures that include additional information regarding the professional affiliation of the licensed member, which is cryptographically asserted and controlled by OAA.
- “Electronic impression” or “Seal Image” means a visual reproduction of a physical seal, which will be provided by the OAA. Members may add the visual image of their hand-written signature to the image provided by the OAA. The date and time will be embedded in the digital certificate and is verifiable.

B. Use

Where the member is sharing drawings with consultants or any other parties involved in the project, it is important to remember to remove the digital signature from the file, or lock the original digital signature to prevent misuse of your seal. Turning off the layer in the software program of your choice is not sufficient.

Seal images should not be confused with digital signatures or digital seals. Once subscribed to the Notarius seal process, the Digital Seal is used for documents to be authenticated electronically. The digital seal confirms that the document was signed by a professional licence holder of the OAA, and that the content of the document has not changed since it was signed.

OAA members shall ensure their digital seal remains under their control to prevent unauthorized use and to maintain trust in the digital OAA seal. Also, the OAA member must always retain exclusive control of the use of the digital seal. Authority to use one's digital seal shall not be delegated to anyone nor shall the personal security codes enabling use of the digital seal be shared.

The security of the digitally signed and sealed document is verified through the digital certificate. The digital certificate can also be applied to an image of a member's signature or initials.

C. Obtaining your Digital OAA Seal

Members who wish to obtain their digital OAA seal must purchase a licence to use their Seal. Their seal will be controlled through the use of a secure password and possession of the digital certificate. To apply for a digital certificate, visit the [OAA section on the Notarius website](#) or visit <https://www.notarius.com/en/certifio/pro/oa>.

For technical assistance, contact Notarius Customer Support by calling 1-855-505-7272 or by emailing support@notarius.com.

ⁱ **OAA Member:** Every person licensed by the Ontario Association of Architects is a member of the Association, subject to any term, condition or limitation to which the licence is subject. R.S.O. 1990, c. A.26, s. 5 (1).

References to the OAA seal in the *Architects Act* and the Regulation made thereunder:

Architects Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. A. 26 sections 7(14), 41, and 46.

Regulation 27, R.R.O. 1990, O. Reg 27 sections 1, 41, 42 (18),(19),(21), (22), (25), (27) and (54)

The OAA does not provide legal, insurance, or accounting advice. Readers are advised to consult their own legal, accounting, or insurance representatives to obtain suitable professional advice in those regards.
