

May 25 , 2007

Chief Executive Officers,
All Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks
Dear Sir,

Know Your Customer (KYC) Norms / Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Standards / Combating of Financing of Terrorism (CFT) – Wire Transfers

Banks use wire transfers as an expeditious method for transferring funds between bank accounts. Wire transfers include transactions occurring within the national boundaries of a country or from one country to another. As wire transfers do not involve actual movement of currency, they are considered as a rapid and secure method for transferring value from one location to another.

2. The salient features of a wire transfer transaction are as under :

i) Wire transfer is a transaction carried out on behalf of an originator person (both natural and legal) through a bank by electronic means with a view to making an amount of money available to a beneficiary person at a bank. The originator and the beneficiary may be the same person.

ii) Cross-border transfer means any wire transfer where the originator and the beneficiary bank or financial institution are located in different countries. It may include any chain of wire transfers that has at least one cross-border element.

iii) Domestic wire transfer means any wire transfer where the originator and receiver are located in the same country. It may also include a chain of wire transfers that takes place entirely within the borders of a single country even though the system used to effect the wire transfer may be located in another country.

iv) The originator is the account holder, or where there is no account, the person (natural or legal) that places the order with the bank to perform the wire transfer.

3. Wire transfer is an instantaneous and most preferred route for transfer of funds across the globe and hence, there is a need for preventing terrorists and other criminals from having unfettered access to wire transfers for moving their funds and for detecting any misuse when it occurs. This can be achieved if basic information on the originator of wire transfers is immediately available to appropriate law enforcement and/or prosecutorial authorities in order to assist them in detecting, investigating, prosecuting terrorists or other criminals and tracing their assets. The information can be used by Financial Intelligence Unit - India (FIU-IND) for analysing suspicious or unusual activity and disseminating it as necessary. The originator information can also be put to use by the beneficiary bank to facilitate identification and reporting of suspicious transactions to FIU-IND. Owing to the potential terrorist financing threat posed by small wire transfers, the objective is to be in a position to trace all wire transfers with minimum threshold limits. Accordingly, we advise that banks must ensure that all wire transfers are accompanied by the following information:

(i) Cross-border wire transfers

(a) All cross-border wire transfers must be accompanied by accurate and meaningful originator information.

(b) Information accompanying cross-border wire transfers must contain the name and address of the originator and where an account exists, the number of that account. In the absence of an account, a unique reference number, as prevalent in the country concerned, must be included.

(c) Where several individual transfers from a single originator are bundled in a batch file for transmission to beneficiaries in another country, they may be exempted from including full originator information, provided they include the originator's account number or unique reference number as at (b) above.

(ii) Domestic wire transfers

(a) Information accompanying all domestic wire transfers of Rs. 50000/- (Rupees Fifty Thousand) and above must include complete originator information i.e. name, address and account number etc., unless full originator information can be made available to the beneficiary bank by other means.

(b) If a bank has reason to believe that a customer is intentionally structuring wire transfers to below Rs. 50000/- (Rupees Fifty Thousand) to several beneficiaries in order to avoid reporting or monitoring, the bank must insist on complete customer identification before effecting the transfer. In case of non-cooperation from the customer, efforts should be made to establish his identity and Suspicious Transaction Report (STR) should be made to FIU-IND.

(c) When a credit or debit card is used to effect money transfer, necessary information as (a) above should be included in the message.

iii) Exemptions

Interbank transfers and settlements where both the originator and beneficiary are banks or financial institutions would be exempted from the above requirements.

4. Role of Ordering, Intermediary and Beneficiary banks

(i) Ordering bank

An ordering bank is the one that originates a wire transfer as per the order placed by its customer. The ordering bank must ensure that qualifying wire transfers contain complete originator information. The bank must also verify and preserve the information at least for a period of ten years.

(ii) Intermediary bank

For both cross-border and domestic wire transfers, a bank processing an intermediary element of a chain of wire transfers must ensure that all originator information accompanying a wire transfer is retained with the transfer. Where technical limitations prevent full originator information accompanying a cross-border wire transfer from remaining with a related domestic wire transfer, a record must be kept at least for ten years (as required under Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002) by the receiving intermediary bank of all the information received from the ordering bank.

(iii) Beneficiary bank

A beneficiary bank should have effective risk-based procedures in place to identify wire transfers lacking complete originator information. The lack of complete originator information may be considered as a factor in assessing whether a wire transfer or related transactions are suspicious and whether they should be reported to the Financial Intelligence Unit-India. The beneficiary bank should also take up the matter with the ordering bank if a transaction is not accompanied by detailed information of the fund remitter. If the ordering bank fails to furnish information on the remitter, the beneficiary bank should consider restricting or even terminating its business relationship with the ordering bank.

5. These guidelines are issued under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949(AACS) and any contravention thereof may attract penalties under the relevant provisions of the Act.

6. Please acknowledge receipt to the Regional Office concerned.

Yours faithfully,

(N.S.Vishwanathan)
Chief General Manager-in-Charge