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R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E

The heart of the matter

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PRESIDENT

In the '60s and '70s, the salaries of engineers compared favourably to those of doctors and lawyers, professionals with whom we often like to compare ourselves. Back then, approximately 90 per cent of eligible candidates applied for licensure as professional engineers in Ontario. Today, only about 30 per cent of qualified Canadian candidates apply and salaries are more comparable to elementary and secondary school teachers. The current national average of licensure uptake by Canadian graduates is in the 60 per cent range. It has become quite apparent that graduate engineers are questioning the need to be licensed. This has led to a decrease in the prestige of our profession.

We need to get to the heart of the reasons for this low rate of licensure uptake and salary discrepancy.

I believe one reason for the perceived irrelevance of the P.Eng. licence in Ontario is the industrial exception (another reason was discussed in my May/June President's Message). The *Professional Engineers Act* states that no person shall engage in the practice of professional engineering without a licence. However, section 12(3)(a) of the Act contains an exception for machinery or equipment, other than of a structural nature, for use in the facilities of a person's employer in the production of products by a person's employer. The problem with the status quo is that by listing only the exception, the Act becomes difficult to interpret, and poses a problem for us as to how broadly this narrow exception has been interpreted by industry. The relevant clauses need to be amended to tighten up and clarify their meaning.

Also problematic is section 12(1)(b) of the Act, which states that anyone can do work within the definition of professional engineering as long as a professional engineer takes responsibility for those actions. Stories have been related to me of

single P.Engs taking responsibility for the designs of entire staffs of unlicensed "engineers," some up to 50 people. While this is acceptable under our current rules, I don't believe this is an appropriate practice. To maintain the integrity of our licence, I believe limits need to be set on how many unlicensed "engineers" may be supervised by a licensed engineer. Furthermore, PEO should prosecute all unlicensed "engineers" who refer to themselves as engineers, as they are *not* engineers unless they *are* licensed.

PEO's current policy is to educate industrial employers through its Enforcement Communications Plan about the requirements of the Act and the need for licensure. But I believe we could do much more. Of all the jurisdictions in Canada, only Ontario has an industrial exception in its Act; and although the removal of the

plene, government relations and volunteer management, as well as underemployment issues related to international engineering graduates (IEGs).

In the case of the latter, I believe IEGs need to be better informed of the employment opportunities (or lack thereof) in our province before they arrive. Attendees at the Mississauga Chapter's town hall meeting in May heard from newcomers who had difficulty in finding employment in the province. It was troubling to learn that only one in five immigrants is interviewed by a Canadian agent prior to their arrival. The newcomers indicated that, had they been provided with relevant and current employment information, some would have come to the realization that their career opportunities may be better in their native country. Unfortunately, PEO cannot currently provide the federal gov-

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exception requires an Act change, I believe it is a step worthy of pursuing. This would make the P.Eng. licence more relevant to a wider audience.

Of the 70,000 members licensed by PEO, we currently have no indication of the areas of engineering in which they practise (or if they are even employed as engineers). Although we encourage members to voluntarily report their scope and practice, using PEO's online voluntary annual reporting mechanism, and it is a requirement that Certificate of Authorization holders provide such information, we do not currently compel licence holders to update their information. This information would be helpful for our activities related to enforcement, disci-

ernment with such vital information. This needs to change.

Many of these ideas were discussed and debated at PEO Council's workshop in June. And many of my colleagues were not in agreement with me on the course of action the association should take to address these issues. Perhaps my explanation was not as clear and compelling as it should have been. I hope my message here will further enlighten the situation.

In this, my fourth tenure as President, I am still troubled by how licensure in our profession has seemingly become less relevant over the years. My hope is that our Council will make every effort to reverse this alarming trend. There is much work to be done. ❖