

OUTREACH TO NATURAL SCIENTIST COMMUNITY COULD BE AMONG PEO'S FINEST MOMENTS



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IT CAN BE QUITE INSTRUCTIVE to note how a seemingly minor administrative change can provoke the full-scale problem-solving apparatus of PEO.

When it was announced in late 2010 that an updated definition of professional engineering was about to be proclaimed as part of the many changes brought about by the Ontario government's Open for Business legislation, little did we anticipate the subsequent fallout.

In PEO's view, the new definition was an effort to bring clarity to the understanding of professional engineering. The older definition, in place since 1984, included "exception" language, to wit that engineering does not include practising as a natural scientist.

PEO believed dropping the reference to professional engineering not including the practice of natural science would help better explain the practice of professional engineering by focusing on what it is, rather than what it is not. The new definition also adheres more closely to a national understanding of professional engineering embraced by Engineers Canada and several of its provincial/territorial constituent engineering regulatory bodies.

Simple, right? Well, perhaps not. When Ontario's natural scientist community, led by the 17,000-member-strong Canadian Association of Physicists, got wind of the change, there was, to use a summer season baseball term, a royal rhubarb. The natural scientists did not want to see the removal of the exception clause out of concern that some scientists practising in their fields could be subject to enforcement action by the engineering regulator.

Although PEO never had sway over natural science—and incidents of PEO cracking down on natural scientists when they are practising natural science are almost nil—the lack of a clear definition of the practice of natural science and hence a clear boundary between the professions is a lingering concern.

PEO's efforts to respond to the natural scientist community's concerns are the focus of the main feature of this issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (p. 38). By moving with alacrity to create an Overlapping Practices Committee (OPC), comprising both P.Engs and natural scientists, PEO has demonstrated a strong commitment to responsive and accountable regulation in the public interest. There is a willingness to stand up for its core business of regulating the practice of the profession, while addressing the concerns of a respected group of closely aligned practitioners.

Looking to work together to solve problems, move forward and effect positive relations allows for a graceful (we hope) segue into the introduction of new PEO President Denis Dixon, P.Eng., FEC. Denis was elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility, governance enhancement and support for volunteers as the best path forward for Ontario's engineering regulator. We let Denis explain how positive relations and team building are especially in order as PEO and council emerge from some recent high-profile adventures (p. 30). Σ

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