

What does it take to call yourself a consulting engineer?

PEO's "consulting engineer" designation helps promote recognition of engineers in independent practice. In fact, you can't call yourself a consulting engineer without it

by Alison Piper

Contrary to popular belief, holding a certificate of authorization (C of A) licence from PEO alone does not entitle members to call themselves "consulting engineers" or advertise their services as consulting engineers. Under Regulation 941 under the Professional Engineers Act, only a member who has been designated or redesignated as a consulting engineer by Council can use the restricted title "consulting engineer." Firms also require permission from Council to use the title "consulting engineers" (or a variation of the title approved by Council) in their corporate names.

The "consulting engineer" title or designation is not a licence to *offer* or *provide* professional engineering services directly to the public, however. PEO members generally require a C of A to do this.

According to Larry Pond, P.Eng., chair of the Consulting Engineer Designation Committee, which works with staff and Council to administer the program, the designation and the limits set on consultants who don't hold it "do not appear to be widely understood by PEO members. The committee feels the designation process benefits the public in particular, as well as engineers in general. We've identified a need for a better understanding among members of the purpose and benefits of the designation."

Getting designated

Requirements for designation as a consulting engineer include:

- ◆ being a PEO member in good standing;
- ◆ having at least five years of experience satisfactory to Council, in excess of the four-year experience requirement for licensure;

◆ being "primarily engaged" in the independence practice of professional engineering in Ontario for the last two years. To be considered primarily engaged in independent practice, applicants must either derive at least 50 per cent of their earned annual income from consulting engineering or spend at least 50 per cent of their work time in consulting. The applicant must also either hold a C of A from PEO, or be a partner or an employee of a firm holding a C of A, in which case they must be designated in the firm's C of A application as a P.Eng. who assumes responsibility for, and supervises, the firm's professional engineering services.

Applicants must also provide five references who can attest to their professional engineering experience and character (three must be P.Engs and two must be clients), and specific details on engineering projects completed over the last five years. Designation of a consulting engineer is for a period of five years, after which members must apply to PEO to be redesignated by Council.

The Consulting Engineer Designation Committee (CEDC) reviews applications from members for designation and redesignation as consulting engineers, provides peer review of candidates according to the requirements of Regulation 941, and then makes recommendations to Council on whether applicants should be designated or redesignated. The committee also reviews requests from firms for permission to use the term "consulting engineers" in their corporate names, and makes recommendations to Council on the appropriateness of the usage. Currently, about 1500 members hold the consulting engineer designation.

Larry Pond says the designation's primary purpose is to establish a minimum acceptable level of experience for C of A holders wishing to use it. "A secondary purpose is to promote recognition of engi-

neers who provide services directly to the public," he adds. "Although the designation doesn't necessarily signify a higher level of technical competence, it does indicate that the individual has obtained a minimum level of experience [currently five years] beyond that required for licensure. Receipt of the designation also means the applicant has been subject to both the screening process and to peer review by the professional engineers on the CEDC."

A time for review

A CEDC subcommittee recently reviewed the designation's purpose and identified objectives and recommendations for improving the program, with the overall goal of raising the public's trust in it and improving members' understanding of it. These were submitted to Council for its information in February. Specific measures the committee has identified for improving the designation process include:

- ◆ clarifying the information PEO provides on requirements for designation to help ensure that the requirements are well understood by applicants;
- ◆ defining the designation's relationship with the C of A licence;
- ◆ establishing criteria that would enable the designation of distinguished representatives of the academic community (who may not meet the criteria required to be considered "primarily engaged" in independent practice);
- ◆ formal mentoring of applicants;
- ◆ enhanced peer review.

Sections 56-71 of Regulation 941 set out the rules for the designation and redesignation of consulting engineers. For more information on the Consulting Engineer Designation Program, contact Angela Gallant at: (416) 224-1100, ext. 491, or (800) 339-3716; email: agallant@peo.on.ca ◆