

Luxury and safety in one

I read the article "Still concerned for safety" in the November/December 2001 issue (p. 6) with much interest. Without doubt, public safety is the most important of an engineer's responsibilities.

I am a stress engineer in the consulting field and officially retired in 1998 after some 40 years in the aerospace industry. Occasionally I still travel to Montreal on business and have stayed at L'Appartement on Sherbrooke Street West. It's an older building with about 12 floors and is rather

unique in that it has a swimming pool on the top floor. This attractive feature with all its natural light did, and still does, seem an odd and extravagant design. It must have been a cost penalty to provide the additional structure necessary to support the pool weight and water.

However, think of all the possibilities for fire protection with all that mass of water, not dependent on pumps, being immediately available to dump in a very large quantity on a fire. If it were designed in combination with the large area air ducting system and triggered by thermal fuses, the volume of water could be brought to the fire source very quickly indeed.

In the case of an aircraft impact, perhaps a large amount of the burning jet fuel may well be washed out of the building by the flood, thereby reducing the fire. Also, the remaining damaged building structure would be subject to lower loads because the swimming pool water weight is now removed.

It could be argued that aircraft impact is highly unlikely to occur again, but nuclear plants are protected with attached costly vacuum buildings against similar disasters. Is it not possible that someone of significant wealth would be quite happy to pay a premium for the privilege of a penthouse open-air swimming pool in downtown Manhattan?

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Nuclear power best choice

The letter to the editor by John DeGroot, P.Eng., "Why not nuclear power?" in the January/February 2002 issue (p. 7), was right on the money. Ontario Hydro, along with Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, helped to pioneer Ontario's nuclear power with the Douglas Point and Pickering generating stations. These splendid plants were built at a time when Ontario Hydro had their own construction forces and cost control discipline. Once completed, departmental empire building seemed to become the order of the day with disastrous results.

Then in the last quarter of the 20th century, nuclear power became fair game, and the victim of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, "the gulls squalled down the eagles." Nuclear power appears to be the best current practical choice for the future.

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OSPE short on specifics

In the presidential message that appeared in the January/February 2002 issue (p. 3), Mr. Sterling, P.Eng., asked "What are you waiting for?" in relation to becoming full members of OSPE, the engineer's advocacy group.

The answer for myself is simple. I have no idea what positions OSPE is going to hold on various issues and how it is going to form such opinions. OSPE, and the pages of *Engineering Dimensions*, have been totally silent on specifics. All we hear about are the formation of committees, the development of strategic plans, carrying out surveys and research, and the espousing of generalities such as "boosting the profile of the profession."

My guess is that social issues will be central to the OSPE advocacy strategy—how better to catch the interest of both the public and the media. However, this presents a very significant problem for OSPE. How does it take a social or political position when representing tens of thousands of engineers? The very fact that *Engineering Dimensions* and OSPE have never addressed this issue causes me concern.

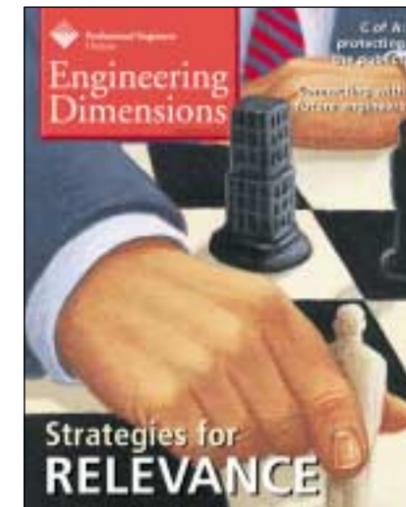
In forming any opinion, OSPE must root its position exclusively upon the "engineering method." If it doesn't, a huge opportunity will be lost and the credibility of the engineering profession will actually diminish over time. The reason that engineers have something to offer in the debate on social issues is due to the fact that our experiences and training have taught us skills that seem never to be used in the public arena today: how to interpret data, understanding the difference between cause and effect and how best to avoid costly mistakes.

OSPE must address this issue before I will become a full member.

Geoff Francis P.Eng.
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Industrial exemptions weaken relevance

We hear a lot about relevance. The January/February *Engineering Dimensions* cover blurb (p.5) asks: "How do we make the engineering licence relevant to all?" As one of the overwhelming majority of engineers (professional or graduate) not employed in a position that provides services to the public, after 30 years I am still asking this ques-



tion. I am not satisfied present activity addresses relevance, licensing or "public welfare" as covered in the *Professional Engineers Act*, though the work of these individuals certainly involves the practice of engineering. Can PEO and licensure be relevant to a work situation where they are exempt from the licensing requirements of the Act?

Let me highlight reality in a large industrial complex employing many individuals engaged in the practice of professional engineering for their employer:

- ◆ Many are not PEO members in fact, many are not graduate engineers nor are they overseen by engineers.
- ◆ For internal company engineering a seal is never used as licensing is not required.
- ◆ Engineering responsibility is not defined.
- ◆ Supervisors and managers of engineers/engineering are often not engineers.
- ◆ Central engineering organizations of the company provide services across the country.
- ◆ Overnight and without discussion a company can downsize or eliminate entirely its engineering resources, without any engineering scrutiny as to pos-

sible shortfalls of these drastic business decisions.

- ◆ There is no code of practice or body of governance for these engineers.

I would ask the present activity on relevance and advocacy to speak to this scenario. It is the bread and butter issue.

A PEO Member (name withheld by request)

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