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D I T O R ' S
N O T E

Making a list; checking it twice

A co-worker recently sent me an email containing a great comic strip (it's signed "King" but I have not been able to determine the cartoonist). The strip shows a surgical team around a table, the patient clearly not anaesthetized, and the surgeon, anaesthetist and another health care professional looking inquiringly at another nurse. The surgeon, scalpel in hand, says to the nurse: "Nurse, get on the Internet, go to SURGERY.COM, scroll down and click on the 'Are you totally lost?' icon."

I laughed, as I'm certain others did who saw it, because we know the "For Dummies" series of books covers everything from learning computer programs, to cooking, to languages. Is surgery somewhere down the line? And what about soil remediation or constructing a furnace facility?

Okay, a little dramatic, yes, but we have developed in our culture this mentality that anything can be learned and accomplished by following a simple checklist. Everything can be "as easy as 1-2-3." Well, relatively, of course.

But as a member of the public, and I'm certain most would agree with me, this trend must have limits. I don't want the surgical team removing my appendix, or the engineering team designing the building where I work, to be following a list, simply checking off the steps.

When I read the President's Message (page 3), and spoke with President Comrie, this is what I understood: that some engineering-related activity falls into grey areas that do not necessarily require an engineer (or geoscientist or architect or other regulated professional) to be responsible for

them, and so governments regulate these with certain prescriptive codes. The problem is, anyone can learn these laws, follow the rules and make sure the work is in compliance with the code. But what you lose is the depth and breadth of the professional training that allows greater flexibility, creativity and innovative thinking. Is that really in the best interest of the public? I'm inclined to think it isn't.

Past-President Ken McMartin, P.Eng., in his article on page 34 looks at some of the policies introduced to provide greater accountability to the public, and discusses the arguments for and against certification or an added level of specialization for the engineer.

Also with the public interest in mind, retired lawyer David J.D.Sims, QC, a Lieutenant Governor Appointee to Council, goes even further in his article on page 53, outlining a model of professional competence that should be *de rigueur*, not only for professional engineers, but for any self-governing regulatory body.

For as much as we all like to take credit for "looking out for number one," sometimes we do need the help of professionals. And engineers will have to get involved and support a process that will look out for the rest of us.

On a completely separate note, I want to thank the many readers who have sent in articles and letters and who have given us ideas and feedback and suggestions for the pages of the magazine. This is my last Editor's Note, as I will be moving on to another association, but I appreciate the many contributions you have made over the last three years since I became Managing Editor.

Best Wishes.

Joan Bailey
Managing Editor