



The health and safety profession

"Engineers are always in the health and safety business." That statement from Levente Diosady, P.Eng., a food engineer interviewed for one of this issue's features, is exactly why it was difficult to narrow the focus for our health and safety theme. After all, engineers are not only responsible for designing and building everything we've ever dreamed of doing and having—from flying in steel and plastic barrels to constructing oddly shaped buildings—as newly minted President Pat Quinn, P.Eng., pointed out at PEO's recent AGM. Their responsibility goes much farther than that. They have to make sure everyone stays safe on all of those planes and in all of those buildings. No small feat.

In our feature on page 60, Mike Mastromatteo writes that engineers have a special duty to "engineer out" as much risk as can be identified, now or down the road.

And, they do for the most part, although occasionally things go wrong. *Set Phasers on Stun*, a book loaned to me by Gazette editor Bruce Matthews, P.Eng., for inspiration, contains a collection of fairly horrifying anecdotes on technology gone wrong. Although it's rare that engineers make really spectacular mistakes, when they do, it's usually only because they failed to anticipate the amazing array of non-standard behaviour that humans are capable of when interacting with their handiwork.

And, of course, engineering out risk isn't always possible, especially when faced with devastating and unpredictable natural disasters like the Asian tsunami or Hurricane Katrina. But at least with each new disaster comes a better understanding of how to withstand nature's forces next time.

Visibility of the engineering profession is a topic we'll be covering quite often

over the next while as we report on our Government Liaison Program (GLP), now in full swing. The GLP seems to be having the desired effect already, if recent comments by Energy Minister Donna Cansfield are any indication. At a meeting organized by PEO's Etobicoke, Toronto-Humber and North Toronto chapters, the minister, who was guest of honour, referred to a paper recently published by PEO and presented to her on the topic of energy conservation in the province (p. 14). At the meeting, she acknowledged PEO's offer of engineering expertise and vowed to do whatever is necessary to ensure that engineers are partners in decisions made regarding Ontario's energy conservation plans going forward.

There are other signs that the profession is gaining recognition. Case in point: engineering has been included for the first time in the Leger marketing report of the most trusted professions (p. 20). Sure, that nudge by the CCPE may have had a lot to do with this exposure. Well, at least engineers are included now, which is all that matters. It's a pretty good first showing, too. Engineering made the top 10 most trusted professions, tying for fifth place with teachers.

Visibility can be an issue even within the profession sometimes. For example, engineers in other disciplines may not be aware of the contribution engineers make to health care. New research and recent innovations put forth by biomedical engineers are advancing many interesting areas of medicine as you'll see on page 52. As John Yeow, P.Eng., puts it, "Engineers have lots of expertise and technical knowledge to offer in solving the many challenges faced by physicians, oncologists and pathologists." In fact, so much so, that engineers are becoming indispensable members of the health team—just as they are almost everywhere else.

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