

### Government arrogance

Good luck with your court battle with the Ontario government (“Building code impasse headed for court,” *Engineering Dimensions*, March/April 2006, p. 13). But you should realize you are dealing with one of the most arrogant Ontario governments in recent history. Just look at how they dealt with the tribulations of the agricultural sector.

They seem to want to layer expensive bureaucracies onto otherwise well functioning institutions such as PEO, the OMA, etc. In the electrical field we see the introduction of a new Ontario Power Authority, and a massively expensive smart meter program and the associated new Smart Metering Entity, which will produce little return. And now they want to put competent structural and building engineers through a bureaucratic testing procedure to establish their competence.

Remember that they relieved teachers of the need for testing and re-certification and stacked the Ontario College of Teachers with union representatives.

I contracted with a builder for the construction of a new residential building. When the local building inspector needed proof that certain building aspects were safe, he required my builder to get confirmation from a structural P.Eng. Local building officials recognize that building code and associated specifications were written by committees of professional engineers, and very few building inspectors are licensed P.Engs. So professional engineers set up the whole building safety and inspection regimes. Now, we have bureaucrats trying to take that authority.

How many Queen’s Park bureaucrats could certify the safety of structures such as the CN Tower, bridges, high rise buildings, and the like?

If PEO does not win this battle for public safety, maybe it is time to organize, as teachers did, for the 2007 provincial election. Teachers, doctors and lawyers have political power. Professional engineers do not.

*John S. McGee, P.Eng., Barrie, ON*

### Volunteer reality

Although I am a social worker/policy analyst, my husband is an engineer and I often flip through the latest copy of *Engineering Dimensions*, which appears on our coffee table every second month.

Volunteering/participation is an issue of particular interest to me, so I was pleased to see PEO volunteers profiled and recognized in the January/February issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (“For the greater good,” pp. 60-65).

However, I did want to make a friendly comment about Tom Chessell’s article, “Volunteering with PEO: The trends.” On page 71, a profile of volunteers is offered; the first bullet reads that “more men than women volunteer.” Because I have done a fair amount of work around gender-related barriers to civic engagement, I felt that this statement, as presented, was incomplete and potentially misleading. The fact that 89 per cent of PEO volunteers are men is no doubt accurate; however, without knowing what percentage of *all* PEO members are men, the statement does not contribute very much to a discussion of the characteristics of *PEO members* who volunteer. Further, it could be interpreted to imply that women members just aren’t doing their part.

The article also describes the geographic characteristics of volunteers, and provides a very good explanation of the barriers to volunteerism faced by PEO members outside the GTA. This explanation is important, as it serves to recognize the challenges faced by members who live far away, and prevents the impression that they are being chastised for their lack of participation. A similar recognition of the challenges faced by women (who are more likely to have childcare and eldercare responsibilities, fewer financial resources, etc.) would also be important to communicate.

I applaud PEO for pursuing an improved understanding of what motivates those who volunteer and what restricts others from participating, which Tom highlights as an area for future study.

Ensuring that a gender perspective is incorporated in this analysis will make for more effective strategies for increased volunteer participation.

*Kate Murray, MSW, Ottawa, ON*

### Not guilty

After struggling through the recent “Summary of Decision and Reasons” about Mohammad Panahi (*Gazette, Engineering Dimensions*, March/April 2006, pp. 41-47) it occurs to me that the fact that the decision was not guilty should have appeared much earlier in the summary. If I hadn’t been waiting for a repairman and had nothing else to do, I probably would not have made it through all five pages to discover the not guilty finding and would have left the article with the impression that Mr. Panahi had been found guilty. Just a suggestion that perhaps the big print showing the names could also indicate in big print that the poor P.Eng. in question is not guilty.

All engineers struggle with the fact that the important information should be presented to clients early in the communication, rather than on the last page, and PEO should help lead the charge.

*Sally Thompson, P.Eng., Toronto, ON*

### PEO palace?

I am writing in regard to the *Engineering Dimensions* article in the September/October 2005 issue, and the letter to the editor by Peter Broad in the January/February 2006 issue (p. 8).

I think the move downtown is an attempt by the PEO staff and, perhaps, Council to acquire status with opulent headquarters. The reasons given for moving downtown are proximity to government, visibility to corporate businesses and transportation convenience.

In regard to the first point, proximity to government, this might have been of assistance had PEO fought Bill 124 when it really counted instead of when the horse has already escaped the barn. PEO staff and Council were asleep when this issue first arose and their early letters to government reveal very mild

objections. It took individual members to awaken the staff and Council at the annual general meeting.

In regard to the second stated reason, visibility to corporate businesses, I think this is merely a red herring. PEO states its primary purpose is registration, discipline and enforcement (ignoring the glossy magazine with chapter news, member awards, and the latest fancy dinner). Having close corporate neighbours will not make the association any more effective in carrying out its functions. The Royal Bank does not call up to order a dozen engineers just because they're down the street. We would achieve more visibility next to a Tim Horton's drive-through. Could it be that the reason for being downtown is to be near the lawyers? Perhaps, since we're paying them, they can travel to where PEO is located.

In regard to the third stated reason, transportation convenience, I think that could be better achieved by being out on the fringes where parking and access to major highways are more easily available. Certainly, anywhere near a GO Train terminus would make more sense. The requirement that PEO be in Toronto, as required by the *Professional Engineers Act*, did not prevent them from moving to North York (which, as far as I know, did not even exist when the Act was first created).

Based on PEO's performance to date on Bill 124 in representing their members' interests, they should probably be moved to an abandoned hangar at the old Downsview Airbase.

I suspect this move is already a fait accompli, but I feel that something should be said, considering that this decision is costing members money and should not have been made simply by "key stakeholders." I have nothing against PEO owning its own premises and would not want it hidden away in some strip mall, but I believe that, as professionals, we should show some concern for the ethics of our decisions and for the city and its history. Had any consideration been given to the rehabilitation of older and/or historic buildings such as empty schools, etc.?

The ultimate problem is that when you live in palaces, you begin to think you're royalty.

Gary L. Hodgson, P.Eng.,  
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### What's the difference?

What is the difference in the roles of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) and the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE)? I did not vote for the formation of OSPE, nor am I a member, because I never clearly understood why OSPE's advocacy role could not be carried out by CCPE. CCPE would seem to be a better representative—simply because it is a national organization—and the issues are national in scope.

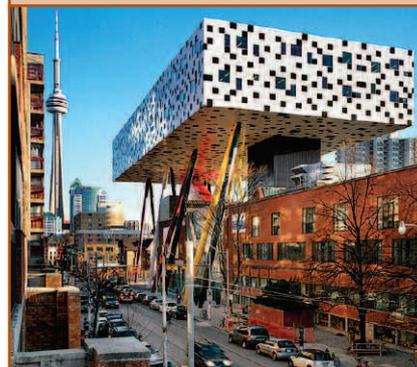
Also, communiques from OSPE have not instilled any confidence in me. If I, as an engineer, am confused by their reports, imagine the confusion by non-engineers. In particular, with respect to the issue of the "oversupply of engineers," it seems as if OSPE is not sure if the oversupply is geographic or by skills/discipline. As evidence, I offer the following:

1. In an October 24, 2005 letter to Stephen Harper, Chris Cragg, P.Eng., then-president of OSPE, stated that the current immigration policy does not provide any "explicit employment information that would help them link their destination to where employment opportunities might be." It also requested that "guidance be given and incentives offered to assist professionals to relocate to locations within Canada ...." This implies the oversupply is geographic.
2. In contrast, the report of the August 29, 2005 meeting with Joe Fontana (then minister of labour and housing) refers to "the oversupply of engineers in some areas of practice" and the request that Fontana "include OSPE in any research about what skills are required in engineering candidates by employers so immigrants can be provided this information overseas." This implies that the oversupply is based on skills/disciplines and is not geographic.

If OSPE is to earn wider support from the engineering community, an explanation as to how OSPE's role is different than CCPE's is needed. The mere fact that OSPE is communicating at the federal level to Harper would support the position that they are duplicating CCPE's advocacy role at the federal level. I would rather see PEO "advocacy funds" used to support CCPE and not OSPE.

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### Correction



In our coverage of the Shreyer Award in our March/April 2006 issue (Awards, p. 21), we neglected to mention the important contribution of engineering firm Carruthers & Wallace (C&W) to the Ontario College of Art & Design's Sharp Centre for Design in Toronto. Chris Andrews, P.Eng., Paul Sandford, P.Eng., Li Ming Tang, P.Eng., and Sha Zhu, of C&W took home the Canadian Consulting Engineering Awards' top prize for the unique "tabletop" two-storey structure that perches on steel columns above the college's main building. This is the second Shreyer Award for C&W. In total, the firm has received Canadian Consulting Engineering Awards nine times since 1969, including this most recent honour.

Letters to the editor are welcomed, but should be kept brief and are subject to editing. Publication is at the editor's discretion; unsigned letters will not be published. The ideas expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions and policies of the association, nor does the association assume responsibility for the opinions expressed. All letters pertaining to a current PEO issue are also forwarded to the appropriate committee for information. Address letters to [jcoombes@peo.on.ca](mailto:jcoombes@peo.on.ca).