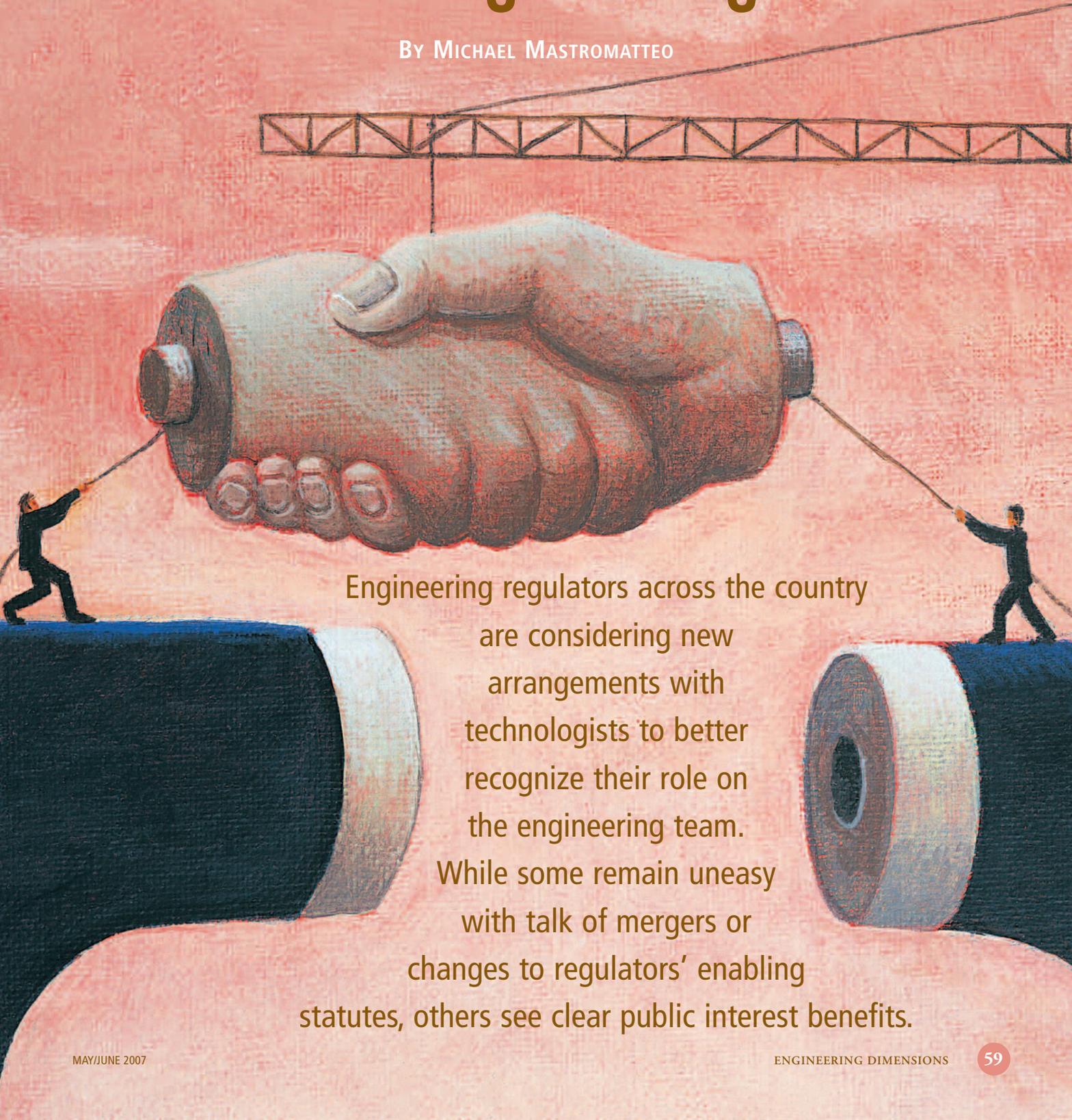


Technologists finding niche on engineering team

BY MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO



Engineering regulators across the country are considering new arrangements with technologists to better recognize their role on the engineering team. While some remain uneasy with talk of mergers or changes to regulators' enabling statutes, others see clear public interest benefits.

The May/June 2004 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* devoted considerable attention to a survey of the engineering profession commissioned by the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE) and the federal government. One of the survey's major subject areas was the emergence of multi-disciplinary teams for what had been considered "engineering-centric" projects.

The 2004 CCPE survey underscored the need for regulators to take note of the blurred, and sometimes overlapping, areas of responsibility between engineers and technologists. In addition to bringing more urgency to the task of more clearly

or engineering technician. OACETT is not empowered to exercise regulatory authority over the scope of practice or manner in which engineering technology is applied in Ontario, or how it affects the public interest. Consequently, PEO members are not only responsible for their own practice of professional engineering; they are also responsible for the work of the technicians and technologists on whose work they increasingly rely in the course of their work."

Explosive growth

The task force found that the "explosive growth" of science and technology has changed the environment in which pro-

a regulatory merger of P.Engs and technologists while others remain opposed to the concept.

PEO has responded by continuing to move forward with the recommendations of the Technologist Licensure Task Group report. Key to the implementation of the LET designation has been creation of a Joint Oversight Committee between PEO and OACETT to set the legal and administrative groundwork within both associations.

The first step has been to make the entire limited licence process easier to understand and to access, for CETs and for all others who might be eligible to apply for a limited licence.



defining scopes of practice for engineers and technologists, the team work focus also compelled regulators to consider creating new classes of professional licence to accommodate the presence of engineering paraprofessionals on work teams.

As was noted in the 2002 report of PEO's Technologist Licensure Task Group, the rise of engineering technologists, such as those belonging to the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT) require PEO and OACETT to consider updating the licensing and regulatory framework in engineering.

"Unlike the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA), the OACETT Act does not confer to certified engineering technologists an exclusive right to a defined area of practice," the PEO task force report noted. "Nor does it interfere with the right of any person to describe himself or herself as being, or doing the work of, a technologist, engineering technologist, technician

professional engineering is practised and regulated. "The field of engineering is expanding rapidly with work that was traditionally performed by professional engineers now being entrusted to engineering technicians and technologists," the report concluded.

The task force recommendations were presented to PEO Council in March 2002 and were approved six months later. Chief among them was a plan to create a Licensed Engineering Technologist (LET) designation as a class of limited licence, and, eventually, allow limited licence holders in Ontario, including qualified certified engineering technologists (CETs), to offer services to the public within defined areas of responsibility.

Several engineering regulators in Canada are well down the road in forging new relationships with their technologist colleagues, although progress has been sporadic at best, with some striving toward

A sticking point has been the final goal of making a limited version of the Certificate of Authorization (C of A) available to limited licence holders. A C of A authorizes the holder to offer or provide engineering services to the public. Initially, it was uncertain whether attaining this goal would require amendment of the PEA or could be attained by amending Ontario Regulation 941/90, a much less time consuming process. Eventually, PEO and OACETT agreed on a plan to amend the Regulation to create a class of temporary licence for limited licence holders, including LETs, which would be subject to certain prohibitions, such as using the P.Eng. designation. Holders of temporary licences are eligible to hold Cs of A.

As of May 1, the proposal to amend the Regulation to create the class of temporary licence was still with the attorney general's office to prepare the final regulation changes.

Some time ago, the province's engineering and technologist associations joined forces to establish the Registered Professional Technologist (RPT) designation

Responsibility for work

Meanwhile, Alberta engineers and technologists have come to a new understanding about mutual regulation, competence assurance, discipline and other matters of self-regulation in the public interest.

Some time ago, the province's engineering and technologist associations joined forces to establish the Registered Professional Technologist (RPT) designation, a professional licence allowing holders to practise engineering (or geoscience) within a clearly defined scope of practice. RPTs can practise engineering, geology or geophysics in Alberta independently within narrow, defined scopes of practice and take responsibility for the work. This category of licensure recognizes that certain qualified individuals can be permitted to independently carry out certain specific functions normally within the definition of professional engineering, professional geology or professional geophysics without the supervision of a professional engineer, geologist or geophysicist.

Now, the two groups are nearing completion of an official merger under what has been described as a "one act, two associations" model. With the one act, two associations model, the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA) and the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) have agreed that certified technologists practising under supervision will

be regulated by ASET, and that engineers and geoscientists practising independently will be regulated by APEGGA. Technologists practising independently will be regulated jointly by ASET and APEGGA.

Previously, ASET had been pressing the Alberta government to create a new act making ASET the regulator of technologists with the right to practise independently. APEGGA, meanwhile, had argued for an amendment to the existing engineering act to allow APEGGA and ASET to jointly regulate technologists who practise independently.

Although the new "one act, two associations" arrangement initially met with resistance in some parts of the province, it reflects the trend of bringing related professions under "umbrella" regulatory frameworks. Most recently, APEGGA members approved the concept in a referendum.

Two acts rule

In British Columbia, however, a proposal for a similar merger was rejected in 2004 by the province's engineering regulator, despite some initial acceptance of the plan.

Gillian Pichler, P.Eng., director of registration for the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC), said there is no current plan to resurrect the merger arrangement.

"BC still has two acts and two associations for engineers, with the right to title and right to practise, and applied science technologists and technicians, who have right to title only," Pichler said.

Despite agreeing to end the merger talks, the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia (ASTTBC) group appears committed to pressing the provincial government for a new model that would more closely align regulation of engineers with technologists/technicians.

The association has approached BC's ministries of Advanced Education and Economic Development with a proposal to create umbrella legislation bringing regulation of engineers and technologists under one more inclusive act. Both ministries have advised the technologists' association to discuss their proposal with the affected stakeholders, who at this point appear unreceptive to the idea.

The ASTTBC has outlined its ideal vision of a legislative framework for regulated professions. It sees the eventual broad grouping of related self-governing professions and occupations, similar to the umbrella legislation now in force in some provinces for health care professions.

Scope of practice licence

Engineers and technologists in the province of Manitoba are also considering new arrangements to recognize and benefit from the contributions of technologists to the engineering team.

According to Grant Koropatnick, P.Eng., executive director of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba (APEGM), relations between the two groups remain healthy and vibrant.

"Our APEGM-Certified Technicians and Technologists Association of Manitoba (CTTAM) joint board will discuss a specified scope of practice licence for technologists," Koropatnick told *Engineering Dimensions*. "The specified scope of practice licence already exists in our *Engineering and Geoscience Act*, but will need some modifications. The process is underway and full of complexity, and I doubt it will become a big issue here in Manitoba as we have a small group of technologists, and demand for the scope of practice licence is believed to be low. However, we are happy to discuss it with them and are open to new ideas."

The efforts of engineering regulators across the country to recognize members of the engineering team could also present opportunities for international engineering graduates to gain access to the profession. Former PEO President George Comrie, P.Eng., made note of this opportunity in a March 2005 letter to the attorney general. Writing about progress with PEO's licensed engineering technologist effort, Comrie said the LET designation could have benefits beyond protection of public safety and enhancement of the engineering team. "This has particular application to certified engineering technologists, trained both in Ontario and, equally important, for internationally trained professionals who have the ability and training to practise engineering and an interest in doing so here." 