

## STRENGTHENING OUR STATUS

As a student of professional regulation, I read with interest Michael Mastromatteo's insightful article entitled "New era for self-regulation about to unfold" in *Engineering Dimensions* (November/December 2009, p. 26). There can be no doubt that the regulatory landscape in which PEO operates is changing, and that PEO must consider how it will adapt to external pressures like those cited in the article.

But I would not want anyone to conclude from the article that professional self-regulation as we know it in Ontario is doomed.

In his research and book *Death of the Guilds*, Professor Krause did not consider Canada's self-regulating professions. Had he done so, I believe he would have found that our system is the strongest in the world in terms of professional autonomy. This is at least partly because our professions are not "guilds" in which professional self-interest is dominant, but rather delegated regulatory authorities in which the public interest is dominant. I think ours is actually a very good regulatory model for professions, with the potential to provide much better public protection at much lower cost than the models prevalent in other jurisdictions.

I'm not suggesting that we don't need to be concerned about external pressures that threaten our self-regulatory status. As Richard Steinecke has noted, and as our own experience with the building code certification issue confirmed, governments are all too eager to intervene whenever they perceive a public issue with professional regulation. As I see it, one reason that the medical profession's independence is in jeopardy is its failure to deal effectively with medical malpractice. The argument seems to be that, given our shortage of doctors, it is better for the public to have access to an incompetent or unprofessional doctor than none at all. And a member of the bar in a recent published article has questioned why lawyers should be permitted to regulate themselves given their (the law societies') track record of protecting the public against legal malpractice. So how should we respond to these realities?

Well, the system may not be working perfectly, but I have trouble believing that a system of direct government regulation would work any better. And I happen to think we in engineering are doing a somewhat better job of self-regulation than our colleagues in law and medicine. The clear message for the professions is that, rather than waiting to be thrown out with the bathwater, we should make it a priority to ensure we are doing the best possible job we can for the public in the discharge of our regulatory mandate.

The other important point that the article makes is that we need to make sure the public understands what a good deal they're getting, i.e. the value proposition inherent in professional self-regulation. In this regard, we actually need to distance ourselves from government to avoid the taint of widespread public mistrust of government and its democratic institutions. We need to highlight our independence of government (that's the biggest piece of the value proposition) by offering clear policy directions unencumbered by partisan considerations, and by taking the initiative to resolve problems within our sphere of influence without waiting for government intervention.

The bottom line is this: Our self-regulatory status is not in jeopardy if we are prepared to defend and strengthen it. It is ours to lose through neglect!

George R. Comrie, P.Eng., CMC, Etobicoke, ON  
PEO president (2004-2005)



### DAMAGING DISCIPLINE

I found it disturbing to read in the January/February Gazette (*Engineering Dimensions*, p. 35) the court decision overturning the Discipline Committee finding of professional misconduct against

Caskanette and CACE. It is clear from reading the decision that the Discipline Committee made serious errors in finding Mr. Caskanette guilty of professional misconduct, when in fact he was not. I expected to also see a response from PEO or from the Discipline Committee to explain what remedial action will be taken to ensure this type of damaging error will not take place again. Instead, PEO has chosen to answer this rebuke with silence.

I then read the letter to the editor from Mr. Caskanette ("Engineering discipline," p. 73). I am greatly impressed with the professional tone of his letter, and the constructive recommendations he is making to PEO, after all he has been through. He is showing far more professionalism than PEO in this matter.

PEO owes him and all PEO members a frank reply.  
John Jones, P.Eng., Melbourne, Australia

## ENGINEERING ETHICS

As a P.Eng. with some considerable seniority (class of '50), I must object to Spencer McEwan's statement that engineering designers should concentrate on what "ought" to be in their designing process ("Students get primer on engineering ethics," *Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2010, p. 18). Any engineer who follows this track will not be at his or her table long. A sound design must consider the cultural, economic and social factors to achieve success. Engineers cannot change the world and to suggest they should work from the "ought" perspective does them no favours. As they say these days, "what is, is" and they then proceed from there.

David L. Jones, P.Eng., Mississauga, ON



### EQUAL JUSTICE?

The article regarding the Caskanette case is truly embarrassing (*Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2010, p. 35). Over the past 30 years, I have wondered if the PEO disciplinary process was fair and equitable.

I am not a lawyer.

However, a cursory review of the Ontario Superior Court ruling indicates that the disciplinary panel and its legal counsel made two serious entry-level mistakes. As clearly stated by the court, the panel didn't do its homework to prove the case and apparently cannot interpret the basic guidelines it is empowered to enforce.

Taking five years to go through a case and to be so blatantly reversed is unacceptable performance.

Rather than just publishing the results in *Engineering Dimensions* and hiding under their desks, I suggest that PEO force the panel members to resign, get new legal counsel, pay the appellant's full legal fees and publish an apology on behalf of all its members. If PEO is serious about maintaining the confidence of its members and its credibility as a self-regulating entity, it needs to act now.

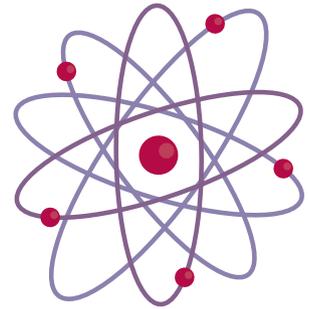
Ron Haughton, P.Eng., Delhi, ON

### NUCLEAR RISKS?

I was pleased to see in the January/February issue of *Engineering Dimensions* not one but two letters about the completely unjustified "crisis" because of supposed global warming ("Risks to our health," p. 73; "The planet's future," p. 74). Fortunately, one doesn't hear much these days from Al Gore!

But I was surprised to see how negative Mr. Vooro was/is on nuclear power. Nuclear is doing the job in plants around the world with excellent safety records. Surely we are past the atom bomb mindset about nuclear?

A.B. Harris, P.Eng., Windsor, ON



### OUR CHALLENGE

This is a reply to the letter entitled "A waste of time" by Mr. Mel Phipps, P.Eng., published in the March/April 2010 edition of *Engineering Dimensions* (p. 66).

I trust that many PEO members were, as I was, deeply offended by the most unfortunate comments about the tragic events of December 6, 1989 at École Polytechnique and the excellent scholarship program of the Canadian Engineering Memorial Foundation (CEMF). How can one seriously argue that the Canadian engineering profession "is tilted heavily to benefit women"

while ours is about the only major profession that continues to cut itself from close to 50 per cent of our country's brain power?

As engineers, we still have a lot of work to do in attracting and retaining many more women into our profession; this is a major engineering challenge of the 21st century, if you ask me. Organizations such as the CEMF play a key role in that regard. What they do should not be "bugging" us, whether we're a man or a woman, but rather be embraced and celebrated by all of us.

Claude Laguë, PhD, P.Eng., ing.

## A SIMPLE STORY

In the article “Remembering December 6” (*Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2010, p. 22), the author writes:

“The effects of this event were felt in many aspects of Canadian culture, including the women’s rights and gun control movements, yet it reverberated particularly in engineering faculties and the engineering profession, which were, and continue to be, dominated by males. George Piper, P.Eng., PEO president in 1989, issued a statement shortly after the event: ‘...we will work harder to eliminate the negative attitudes towards women within our engineering community...’”

This type of post-modern drivel is starting to wear thin. The story is a simple one and not the complicated type involving societal values gone awry or embedded cultural misogyny. The gunman, Marc Lepine, was born Gamil Gharbi, the son of an Algerian who hated women. Mr. Gharbi, like his father, hated women his whole life (like father, like son, as they say). His suicide note made it clear that his ambition was to kill women and he methodically went about planning his attack (I suggest you read his note; it’s available online). He was going to kill women no matter how much awareness or education might have been imposed upon him. Just like Clifford Olson or Ted Bundy, he wanted to kill. Period. The only negative attitudes towards women that existed to prompt this event were in Mr. Gharbi’s twisted, diseased brain. Rather than looking at this as a rare expression of mass homicide, the politically correct, but entirely incorrect, targets of “male domination,” “male attitudes” and “lack of gun control” were held up as the root causes. But no amount of male scapegoating, candlelight vigils, collective Kumbaya or gun control would have stopped it from happening (note: criminals and murderers generally don’t register their guns). It’s a mass murder committed by a homicidal maniac who had been planning it for a long, long time, and that’s it. Everything else is misguided claptrap.

Roger Toutant, P.Eng., Ottawa, ON



## WHY WE REMEMBER

I would like to offer some comments on the letter by Mel Phipps, P.Eng., that appeared in the March/April 2010 edition of *Engineering Dimensions* (“A waste of time,” p. 66). Mr. Phipps makes mention of the École Polytechnique massacre, and asks why we “keep remembering that awful day.” I think the answer is simple. Fourteen women were murdered because they aspired to be professional engineers, just like us, in the atmosphere of what had traditionally been a male dominated profession. As professional engineers, we need to remember that people were killed just because they wanted to be like Mr. Phipps, or like me. They were not killed, as so many others have been, for reasons of religion, language or race. They were killed because they were women who wanted to be engineers.

Despite its overuse, we so often forget that “he [she] who does not learn history is bound to repeat it.” We are all free to contribute, or not, to the scholarship fund that Mr. Phipps mentions, but let us remember that the purpose of the fund is that we not forget history, and that we do our part to encourage women, who still feel timid about engineering, to embrace our profession.

John E. Gruzleski, P.Eng., Guelph, ON

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