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President

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S ometime soon, PEO members will receive a new form to complete and return with your annual licence renewal. Intended to complement the current Membership Information Update form, the new document was developed to implement the Professional Excellence Program (PEP) that Council approved late last year on the recommendation of a task force that I chaired. As you might recall, the approved PEP is intended to paint a broad picture of who you are and what you do, whereas its proposed predecessor was focused on tracking your continuing education activities.

The first part of the new form will ask you to give us information on your job functions, identify your field of expertise, and indicate if it is different from your original bachelor's degree studies. It will also ask you to tell us the industry and sector in which you're employed.

This part of the form is aimed at helping develop a practice profile of Ontario's licensed professional engineers. As I said in the last issue of *Engineering Dimensions* ("Specializing in trust," p. 3, and "Re-igniting Relevance," pp. 32-33), government is increasingly asking PEO questions like: "What are the areas in which your members practise? Are they different now than they were five or 10 years ago? What differences do you foresee five or 10 years from now? How many professional engineers are practising in, say, water treatment and sewage system design, or contaminated site remediation?" Answers to such questions are important to the government when it establishes engineering-related public policy, because for a policy to work as intended it must reflect the realities of engineering practice. That's why it's important

to you that we can provide these answers.

Answering these questions is also beneficial to you because we can use the information to raise the awareness and relevance of engineering as a licensed, self-regulating profession, by communicating widely the competencies of our licensees. The accumulated practice information should also begin to yield insights on trends in engineering practice that will enable us to proactively fine-tune our legislation, guidelines, and other programs to promote competent and ethical practice. Through this process, PEO's admissions and practice standards should always be—and should always be seen to be—rigorous, current and relevant to the needs of society. But it's essential that our requirements not impose artificial barriers to licensing, making it necessary that we understand the current and evolving nature of engineering practice.

When PEO has ready access to this practice information (and judging from the inquiries we get regularly, people think we already do), it will provide assurance that self-regulation in professional engineering is in the public interest, thereby increasing the value of your licence. The core responsibility of every self-regulatory professional body is to ensure the competent and ethical practice of its licensed professionals, and if PEO has no clear picture of where and how the profession is practised, can we claim to be discharging this responsibility as well as we might?

The information from the second part of the PEP form will tell us how you keep up to date in your areas of specialty. Here, you'll indicate your participation in several categories of professional development activity. First, we'll ask you how much time you spend actively practising professional engineering, because engineering is such a dynamic profession that by simply doing your job you cannot help but acquire new knowledge. We'll ask for information on relevant courses you've taken, whether offered by universities, industry, your employer or technical societies, as well as on your self-directed study through reading journals, or attending events. Finally, we'll ask about your contributions to the profession's knowledge base, by making presentations, for example, or through teaching, publishing, mentoring, patenting, or codes and standards development.

Information on practitioners' professional development will quantify for PEO the extent to which licensees maintain their professional competence. Intuitively, we know that the vast majority of professional engineers engage in lifelong learning to stay current. But for those looking into the profession, the low number of complaints relative to the size of PEO's membership could be viewed as good luck rather than good self-regulation, and we do not have data to prove otherwise. We also hope you'll find completing the form a valuable opportunity to record your development activities and areas of expertise—something most of us rarely do until we need the information.

We believe collecting information via the new PEP form is a non-intrusive way for PEO to meet its professional competence mandate. That's why Council has endorsed it over a mandated program of professional development, such as is currently being implemented in Ontario's teaching profession. As the Professional Excellence Program Review Task Force concluded, a mandated program cannot respond to the individual needs of professional engineers, would be resented by them, and would do little to advance public welfare. It would be far better, we reasoned, for PEO to design a program that allows professional engineers to continue to pursue the professional development opportunities of value to them, rather than those we might decide they should pursue. We concluded that the best program would simply confirm that members are meeting their Code of Ethics obligations to practise with "knowledge of developments in the area of professional engineering relevant to any services that are undertaken," and "competence in the performance of any professional engineering services that are undertaken."

I believe our Professional Excellence Program is just such a program and that it can be a source of pride to the profession, by offering visible assurance of the seriousness with which professional engineers view their responsibilities to society. I invite you to give us your feedback on the PEP form after you complete it, so that we can make it as useful—and easy to use—as possible. And I look forward to seeing the portrait of the profession that it will help us to paint. ♦