

UNQUALIFIED OPINIONS

I've been a P.Eng. for almost 40 years. I'm very careful about using my stamp and have only used it where I knew I was qualified and where I had control of the work I was certifying.

I'm writing about situations where professional engineers use their accreditation to support a position where they are not obviously qualified. I believe they do it with great concern for their cause but they also inadvertently drag our profession into potential disrepute.

The situation I'm writing about concerns wind power. There have been a few cases of professional engineers declaring opposition to wind power. That's okay with me.

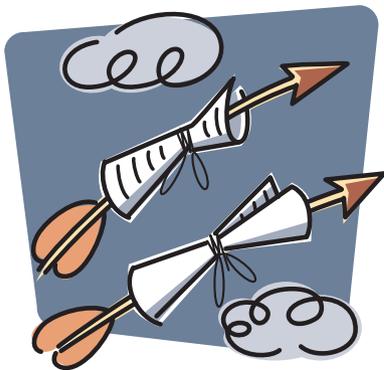
However, they have used arguments about the health effects of wind power where I seriously doubt, in my opinion, they are qualified. What bothers me is they have used their P.Eng. credentials to substantiate their claims. They are not alone. Lawyers and MDs are doing the same. The only common characteristic in these

situations, I believe, is that a wind project has been proposed near their retirement property and so they are clearly conflicted.

I have no problems with individuals voicing their concerns about anything. I do have a problem with professionals and academics using their accreditations to embellish their claims, which, in turn, seduces the public with statements outside their areas of qualification.

This is the sort of action that leads people to say: "How can you tell if a P.Eng. is lying? His/her lips are moving." As a profession, we need to discipline ourselves to use our credentials only where we are truly qualified. If we wish to protest something as normal citizens, that's fine—just drop the P.Eng. accreditation.

Malcolm Hamilton, P.Eng., Toronto, ON



LET'S ALL GET ALONG

I am writing in great disgust in regards to the article "PEO and OSPE strike new accord" in *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2009 (p. 16). It is a sad state of affairs for our profession when our two provincial engineering associations, representing us, must hold meetings and strike an accord to get along and represent their memberships properly. Whom do these council members represent? Us or themselves?

By the gloomy and self-pontificating articles over the past few years in *Engineering Dimensions*, PEO and OSPE are more concerned about attracting "rock star" status with the general public than working together in promoting, advancing and protecting our profession. Get over yourselves and start representing us to protect us and, ultimately, the general public. Finally, PEO is being proactive in relations with regulators rather than assuming we are the best and leaving us alone. This was brought on probably because the Ontario government required engineers to pass the BCIN tests in the past.

My question to you, PEO and OSPE, is: What makes you think the government, other associations and the public will not wonder whether we can self-regulate or even take us seriously if our two associations can't get along and held a meeting to agree to that fact?

André Brisson, P.Eng., Tillsonburg, ON



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Address letters to jcoombes@peo.on.ca.

TECHNICAL vs POLITICAL

We engineers could help ourselves in the process of determining our role by disentangling the technical from the political.

The technical: Yes, climate is changing because it always has changed and always will. Greenland is called that because the Vikings once farmed there. No, that the change is significantly anthropogenic has *not* been proven: (a) consensus and correlation are not proofs; (b) there is no way to subject the hypothesis to the scientific method; and (c) some of the “proofs” depend upon bad science that does not acknowledge facts, such as that we don’t know how rigorously to build things like albedo into our models, or that the Earth has in the past been both far warmer and colder than it is now.

The political: It is now politically incorrect to challenge the anthropogenic-causation hypothesis: (a) an important 2008 meeting of several hundred prominent scientists skeptical of this hypothesis was not, so far as I know, reported anywhere; (b) Ontario school children are being indoctrinated in the politically correct view of global warming by study problems in their science curricula that are political questions poorly disguised as scientific inquiry; (c) people honestly skeptical of today’s “inconvenient truths” are assaulted as “deniers” or subjected to other despicable innuendoes; and (d) the Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth* is being shown uncritically to thousands of school kids despite its many known errors and without presentation of any counterbalancing science or opinion.

The professional, socially conscientious aspect: None of the above excuses engineers or anyone else for ignoring the rape of our precious, fragile Earth that is occurring in Alberta, Peru, Nigeria and any number of other places. Anyone seriously and conscientiously interested in such things should read the fully documented 2008 book *The Tyranny of Oil* for a simply terrifying overview of the utterly disastrous economic, environmental, social and political consequences of a century of just one human activity, the relentless support of our addiction to only one of the fossil fuels: oil. Dare one ask for a similar story of coal? Of methane ice?

If you can excuse the personal reference, I am processing a patent for a device that will greatly reduce the cost and improve the performance of wind turbines. This suggests we, who are bachelors of *science*, should concentrate our efforts toward:

- (a) applying our good brains and talents to improving and promoting alternative energy sources;
- (b) supporting those honestly applying sound science to determine global warming’s causation and direction, and humankind’s contribution to it;
- (c) identifying, publicizing and avoiding those with political or pecuniary agendas;
- (d) refusing to be drawn into no-win political arguments; and
- (e) challenging kooky, risky, trillion-dollar proposals having no predictability of results, such as launching sun-reflective materials into orbit.

Any thoughtful engineer could add many items to this list.

Engineers, for psychological, sociological and mental reasons identified long ago, tend not to be very good politicians. Let us concentrate our good efforts on things we are good at, dipping into politics only when it is necessary to blast someone or something out of our way.

Frank Gue, P.Eng., Burlington, ON



ACKNOWLEDGING CHEMICAL ENGINEERS

PEO Past President Dave Adams, P.Eng., was recently quoted: “...there can be no further accusations that engineering in future belongs solely to the ranks of civil, mechanical and electrical graduates” (*Engineering Dimensions*, July/August 2009, p. 42). As a retired chemical engineering professor, I derive great pleasure from noting that henceforth my own discipline, practised over 100 years and having made innumerable contributions to the welfare of the human race, will be finally recognized. I assume the many hundreds of chemical engineering graduates—to whose education I hope to have made at least a modest contribution during my active years—will also rejoice in Mr. Adams’ oratorical generosity. Thomas Z. Fahidy, PhD, P.Eng., Waterloo, ON

[LETTERS]

LET'S MAKE IT TRULY GREEN

The Liberal government's *Green Energy Act* may be nobly intended legislation—but I fear its impact may be anything but “green.” My principal reservation is that it identifies some technologies as unconditionally green when the context of their application is crucial.

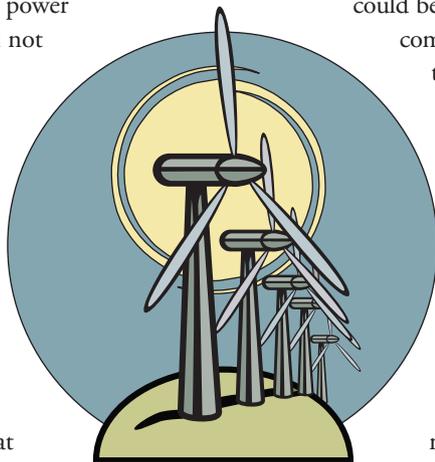
Danish and German studies of windmills have noted the sporadic nature of wind forces dramatic load cycling in back-up generation. So great is the inefficiency this introduces that one can trump the CO₂ reduction associated with the wind, generating even more CO₂ than if the wind power was absent. This need not be a problem!

If the wind generators were remote from the grid, used for a purpose such as charging batteries of electric cars, fluctuations would be unimportant. However, Mr. Smitherman plans that these green technologies are to be used in *preference* to conventional sources, cost be damned! Get used to hearing of nuclear power plants forced at night to operate at their lowest possible power levels—just enough to avoid “poisoning out,” and even at that being forced to dump all their steam directly into the condenser. And while this is happening, these valuable assets will be wearing out at least as quickly as if they were operating at full power.

Solar generation is another item that is to be encouraged in the act. If one is talking of solar collectors on existing buildings and bridges, this is splendidly green. The blazing sun might actually knock the peak off the air conditioning

load, providing power exactly when it is needed most! However, if solar panel “farms” irreversibly pave over agricultural ones, a far worse offense is committed than occurred in last year's infamous “food to fuel” debacle.

Biomass can mean residue from sawmills, which is currently burnt to no advantage. Such a diversion would certainly be a green improvement, provided the generation is close to the source of fuel. But biomass conversion could also mean the elimination of agricultural residue, which is important in maintaining the organic content of soils. And it



could be speeding up through combustion the return to the atmosphere of CO₂ that would

normally have been slowly released through decomposition.

If there is to be another OMB-like body overriding local governments and making victims of some people for an

alleged greater good, it is important that this “good” be just that. How will people feel when they learn that what they have gained is the forced rejection of steam in our nuclear power plants? Or that their higher rates are underwriting the conversion of farmland to industrial activity?

Mr. Smitherman has turned a deaf ear to all inputs along these lines. It is our duty as engineers to apprise non-technical people of what is really at stake. So far, all I have seen in *Dimensions* is talk of the opportunities green technology presents—but nothing about steering it in a genuinely green direction.

Tom Stevens, PhD, P.Eng., Toronto, ON

RE CHOOSING SIDES

If there was ever a need to support the proposition that “an engineering regulator can't choose sides in evaluating global warming science,” you proved it thoroughly via Mr. Tysoe's letter in the current issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (“Choosing sides,” July/August 2009, p. 60). I suppose Mr. Tysoe might possibly be right in his opinion; but despite how unlikely I believe that is, it certainly seems evident that he's not likely to change it any time soon. The good news is that in the same issue I find a thorough-looking discussion of the subject by Lee Norton, P.Eng. (p. 61). So please stay neutral!

R.S. McLean, P.Eng., Nepean, ON

WELCOME TO 2009, PEO

The July/August 2009 issue arrived in my mailbox today. In reading the report on the AGM (“New president seeks collaborative approach to governing,” p. 8), I was very taken aback by the final paragraph: “Tom Adams, an energy consultant, outlined what he feels are weaknesses in the use of wind as a viable source.”

That PEO would invite such a naysayer as a speaker at a meeting, let alone the AGM, speaks volumes about PEO. The rest of the world is looking at alternative energy sources, including wind, and some countries have been very successful. PEO is a dinosaur of an organization, run by dinosaurs for dinosaurs (unless he was booted off the stage). It is almost enough for me to cancel my membership, which I do not need, except that the P.Eng. looks cute on my business card (it serves no other purpose). When will PEO join even the 19th century, not to mention the 20th or 21st century?

David Moffat, P.Eng., Toronto, ON