



Keeping skills updated

With this issue we try to give an overview of the different approaches to promoting and demonstrating professional competence, not just within the engineering profession, but also by looking at what other professions are asking of their members to stay current. We also look at whether what can happen when a practitioner's competence is called into question promotes ongoing professional competence.

Finding the right people to talk to was the easy part—making contact and setting up interviews to get all the details required some persistence. But these challenges were small compared to what the regulatory bodies themselves faced: As may have been expected, setting these requirements has proved to be a bit of a sensitive issue. One challenge faced by the associations was getting members to buy in to the program, whether it be mandatory or optional. Members questioned whether professional development should be used as a condition to maintain their licence to practise. And what would happen to the information provided for review, would it be secure? To facilitate a dialogue, some associations asked for the members to give their input via a survey. CCPE used that approach to get feedback from engineering regulators across Canada in order to develop a guideline for a model competency assurance system. The guideline is posted on line for review by constituent associations.

We have tried to provide a good mix of mandatory and voluntary continued competence programs in our reports. The stories on page 25 and page 30, respectively, look at the proactive measures taken to keep skills and knowledge up-

to-date, and the reactive measures that are necessary when professionals' skills or knowledge may prove lacking.

Setting hours of study, types of study and method of reporting, the associations we looked at have each come up with a unique system for their members. From the Law Society of Upper Canada, which set a recommended annual minimum of self-study and mandated reporting, to the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, which has in place a 90-credit point system that must be accumulated every three years. The story on page 25 also looks at what the architects and geoscientists are doing, which we thought would be an interesting comparison, as practice areas can sometimes overlap engineering. We found the architects in the process of phasing in a system that will be de rigueur as of 2005, and that the issue is still a work in progress for the geoscientists' association, being relatively new, with details for an ongoing program of continued competence still to be determined.

Certainly the considerations of mandated professional development programs are being coloured by the atmosphere of doubt and mistrust that are mentioned both in our feature articles and in our ethics column on page 20. Increased public scrutiny is expected. But as protectors of the public welfare, regulators should welcome that scrutiny.

Watch for our next issue, where we look at some of the newer approaches to engineering education and interview our new president, Ken McMartin, P.Eng., an educator at Carleton University.

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I plan to continue to improve the already good relationship PEO enjoys with both the Society and the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers. We have come a long way but there is still work to be done.

To ensure continuing relevance, PEO also needs to be seen as fair and responsive in our regulatory practices and governance structure. I want to continue to improve our enforcement activities. This is an important area and one that requires concerted effort. The enforcement process reinforces the profession's commitment to protecting the public, while, at the same time, strengthening the value of the P.Eng designation. Our message here needs to be very clear. The PEO enforcement policy is not designed for the self-protection of those who already belong; it is designed to uphold the public's safety. Communicating this principle is essential.

It is also important for engineering students and PEO's engineering interns (EITs) to understand that, as part of the engineering profession, they are responsible for maintaining their own competencies through lifelong learning and skills development. PEO's Student Membership Program (SMP), in the development of which I was involved, provides students with a formal connection to PEO and the licensing process. In PEO's Engineer Internship Training (EIT) program, applicants can continue the process towards full professional licensure.

I am looking forward to the coming year as the President of PEO. In this role, I will have the opportunity to enrich my own experience, through working with engineers in various disciplines from communities across our province. I will use this opportunity to serve the profession and to raise the awareness of the value of engineering and engineers in Ontario. ✦