

IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS



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A FEW WEEKS AGO, I was invited to the Georgian Bay Chapter's annual general meeting to discuss the issues facing our profession in the year ahead.

It was a "come-let-us-reason-together-type" session with little or no discord or dissension evident during the discussion period, when many meaningful questions were raised by the members as we sought answers to determine the best way forward on at least five main issues.

The engineers present represented several industries, including a large contingent of nuclear engineers from Bruce Power, who, I must say, know what regulation is all about.

In my opening remarks, I indicated that I intended to follow a "servant style" of leadership in my upcoming term, a style, embraced by most engineers in practice, for the role of the servant is not uncommon in our profession as we seek to exceed customer expectations in our day-to-day work. I record, for your interest, the following five main expectations from our association, sought by these members on current issues.

1. The requirement for enhanced legislation, through changes in our *Professional Engineers Act* and the Ontario Building Code, to more clearly define both the responsibility and authority of an individual P.Eng. and that of our association itself, in the protection of the public. This requirement was clearly enunciated during discussion of the Elliot Lake mall roof collapse where two were killed;
2. The transfer, or otherwise, of current PEO advocacy work to the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), including portions of the PEO Government Liaison Program;
3. Planned assistance by our association, in maintaining competency records, recorded in member "practice profiles";
4. The requirement for a greater number and more up-to-date practice standards and guidelines; and
5. The need to maintain a vibrant and relevant profession, based upon a P.Eng. with up-to-date technical content, augmented by emerging disciplines.

I will now report recommended actions on these five topics.

1. It was strongly expressed at this meeting that PEO should lobby the government to strengthen the individual engineer's authority and responsibility under the act and building codes, adopting, among other issues, standards and regulations for structural engineering practice and independent construction review by a P.Eng.

The role and responsibility of PEO as the regulatory association was also queried in the discussion, as our duties and status are far from clear in the minds of the participants. Specifically, with respect to the Elliot Lake mall roof collapse, it was asked why we had not adopted the PEO council-approved motion recommending act and regulation changes similar to those enacted in British Columbia, after their mall collapse. Our PEO council motion accepted the BC "engineer of record" solution for structural design and construction review, which is still in use by them to this day.

Our PEO council deliberations on the subject took place roughly nine months before the actual Elliot Lake mall roof collapse, and were conveyed to the Bélanger Commission of Inquiry for their consideration. Commission findings are to be published in October 2014.

2. Transfer, or otherwise, of current PEO advocacy programs to OSPE.

With respect to advocacy, we discussed the fact that the Ontario government had decreed that PEO was to divest itself of member advocacy over 10 years ago. This we tried to accomplish with the transfer of substantial start-up financing and personnel to OSPE. It had been thought their organization would grow well beyond the present 10,000-member range, and would be in a position to advocate for PEO's whole P.Eng. membership.

Because this did not happen, PEO continued to provide limited support advocacy, in some areas with our own staff, sometimes duplicating OSPE efforts. The annual cost to PEO of advocacy programs in 2013 was \$830,000, with \$976,000 budgeted for 2014. In addition to the joint PEO/OSPE awards gala, present PEO advocacy activities range from public policy debates, to education outreach, the Engineer-in-Residence program, National Engineering Month and the general MPP relationship portion of PEO's Government Liaison Program, which is increasingly participated in by PEO chapters.

It is recommended that, after providing some advocacy for over 10 years, PEO should determine

[PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE]

whether we follow the government's intention of PEO divestiture, or we put in place a funding formula, which would enable transfer of the administration of these lingering advocacy activities to OSPE.

3. Planned assistance by our association in maintaining member competency through established practice profile updates.

There was general belief among the participants that it is an individual engineer's responsibility to maintain his or her competency. Further, it was thought each member should design their own training program in conjunction with the needs of their employer, by delineating the continuing education they require to adequately protect the public from engineering failures in their own practice.

Much additional new learning will be common to many engineers of the same discipline, which will assist in qualification recording. When records are established, PEO will be able to verify individual study programs for each practitioner. This will accomplish the objective of allowing selective public inquiry of any member's qualifications.

It was thought by those in attendance at our chapter annual general meeting that the requisite learning should be at a member's own expense, based on the needs arising from their individual practices, plus any individual studies any engineer may want to undertake to improve themselves and their prospects.

Once defined, each practice profile, plus planned study programs, would be recorded by PEO and updated annually at the time of fee payment. If requested, PEO could assist with a member's development by identifying, through OSPE, books, lectures, courses, seminars, webinars, etc., to assist in

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their continuing education. It was thought that PEO money spent in promoting and recording such endeavours would be a sound investment and good use of members' fees.

There was also the negative connotation that if we do not install a continuing competency program soon, it is quite possible public opinion and the government will demand it of us, as has been the case with other professions.

In the opinion of those present, moving on such a voluntary approach to achieving individual continuing competence would be a very positive route to member buy-in and to PEO's ability to assure government we are individually continuing to update our proficiency to protect the public. While other routes to continuing education used by our sister associations include a wide range of technical and business subjects, often sought after by employers, it is believed such subjects should be studied by our members on their own time and dollar, with the proviso that the additional learning be recorded in their competency profile kept by PEO.

In their thinking, the recording of continuing competency and education programs would apply only to registered practising engineers, including engineers in management and teaching. This process will no doubt leave in its wake a "right to title" group of engineers, who we should encourage to remain members, largely because, from PEO's perspective, they often offer useful advice in the direction of our profession and association. Should any of the right to title group decide to enter practice at a later date, particularly if work becomes available, or they move to another province, they would inform PEO accordingly. And if they were just beginning engineering, they might refresh themselves in the EIT [engineering intern] program if necessary, and be registered in our continuing competency program with their own personally formulated practice profile.

The other issues listed as numbers 4 and 5, concerning the adequacy of practice standards and guidelines and maintaining a vibrant engineering profession in Canada, are self-evident and will require renewed effort from our committees and the work of our PEO representatives on the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board of Engineers Canada.

While these forward-thinking ideas were offered by dedicated members, none have been sufficiently researched or officially proposed. Many other issues and their recommended solutions will be discovered as we visit groups of engineers across the province. As we grow more knowledgeable about their requirements for an improved association, we can only imagine a better association in the future.

Thank you for your continued support. Let us serve and grow stronger together as a profession, and as an association. Please email me your thoughts on this progress report, to date, and suggest other steps we might take to improve our association in serving the public. Σ