



## Achieving Separate Licensing of Structural Engineers

By Susan Jorgensen, S.E., P.E.

*“...emphasize the objective: To protect the safety, health and welfare of the public in all that we do.”*

The steps to developing separate licensing of structural engineers are the same from one jurisdiction to another; however, the order in which they are achieved differs from state to state.

The guidelines presented here provide all the major steps toward separate licensing of structural engineers. Some investigation will be required to determine the order in which these steps should be followed and the manner in which they should be utilized in a particular state to achieve the ultimate goal of licensing of, and practice restrictions for, structural engineers.

### *Determine the Objectives*

What is the desired end result and what are the reasons behind it? The bottom line should always be to live up to our ethical obligation to hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the general public. Understanding this, making it clear from the very beginning, and reinforcing it in everything that is done will help increase the chances of success.

### *Identify the Champions*

All efforts need a leader who keeps everyone on the right track. Often this is a single person (the champion) backed up by a great support team, all of whom are dedicated to the same goals. Everyone else will depend on these people to ensure that their efforts remain on track. Above all else, the group that leads this charge must be fully committed to the cause and trusted to see the effort through.

### *Understand the Process*

Every state differs in how the laws and rules for licensing structural engineers may be changed. Doing the research to understand this process is imperative, as it will help to determine how best to proceed. A

thorough understanding of the process, including the motivations and drivers of all parties involved, helps keep you on the right course.

### *Determine the Method*

Implementing change from an active grassroots level can be very effective and requires less funding, but will demand a great deal of time and effort by volunteers. Utilizing the expertise of a lobbyist and other professionals may be more effective in some states, but requires constant funding that may persist over several years. There is no one correct way to go about this; you must determine what will work best in your state.

### *Develop the Statement of Purpose*

A white paper can be very effective in spelling out exactly what the objective is and why it is important. Developing a one-page list of reasons behind the initiative can also be beneficial, keeping everyone focused and moving in the same direction. These types of materials can assist in making sure that the focus and language are always positive when discussing the issues with others, and that the message is clear to all.

### *Gather Support*

The more people you enlist in support of the initiative, the more likely you will be to succeed. The first line of defense should be the structural engineers. Objections more often than not stem from a lack of understanding. Once everyone understands that a) the motivation is the safety, health and welfare of the public; b) the cost to the engineering community (and the public in general) will be minimal; and c) the intent is not to exclude engineers currently in practice but to ensure they will be able to continue to practice without additional examination, then garnering support from structural engineers is likely to be relatively straightforward.

Reach out to other engineering professionals, as well. The civil engineering community recognizes the benefits of credentialing beyond initial licensing. Separate licensing reduces the risks to architects, building officials and licensing boards as they are assured that the engineer stamping the structural drawings is adequately trained and experienced.

### *Marketing Campaign*

Get the word out beyond the professional community. Look for opportunities to get your name and cause in front of the public. Take advantage of every opportunity to differentiate structural engineers from other professionals and deliver the message to the general public. Explain to anyone who will listen what structural engineers do and what sets them apart from other branches of engineering. Ask anyone you meet if they know the credentials of the engineer that designed their school, church, fire station, etc.

Be sure the message is always about the positive aspects and avoid phrases that could cause anxiety or fear. This is not ultimately about the structural engineering community; it is about our ethical duty to the public.

### *Work with the Licensing Board*

Make the licensing board your ally. Having this well-respected group in support of your objectives carries a great deal of weight with the legislature. They understand the process, know the pitfalls and are acquainted with the people who enact change. The board will understand the issues and generally be in support once its members recognize that the primary goal is the safety, health and welfare of the public. Even if the licensing board cannot publicly take a position on the issue, they need to be familiar with the issue and not be in opposition. The easier you make the process for them, the sooner you will get their support.

### Identify a Legislator

An advocate for your cause in the legislature is essential. Do your research to find out who the legislators are (it is all online), where they live and who might be your strongest supporter. Are any of them professionals that are licensed and understand the need for protection of the safety, health and welfare of the public? Understanding what is important to legislators will help you determine how to select your advocate. Primarily, they will support a bill or initiative that will be successful, help make their campaign and image look good, take minimum time and effort and not restrain/restrict business or cost their constituents any money. In many states, enlisting the help of more than one legislator will be beneficial.

Once your supporters in the legislature have been identified, they must be educated. They must fully understand the reasons and the purpose behind the Bill, and be willing to stand alone on the floor speaking for the Bill and answering questions.

### Write the Legislation

Take the existing rules and legislation that govern the licensing and practice of engineering and revise them accordingly. Be sure that you understand what you are trying to achieve and write the legislation to reflect it. In many instances, the legislative language regarding the practice of engineering is fairly straightforward. Do not start from scratch; other states have already developed rules and statutes that you can use as a starting point for developing your legislation.

Include everything that you think would make the Bill ideal in a perfect world. Asking for everything you want, and then some, will allow room for negotiations so that the end result is something with which you can live. Be careful with the wording to avoid unintended consequences. Watch for terms and phrases with double meanings. Have others read the language, including those not directly involved, and get their perspectives on what you are trying to achieve.

Do not forget the most important aspect of this change – the Transition Clause. Make

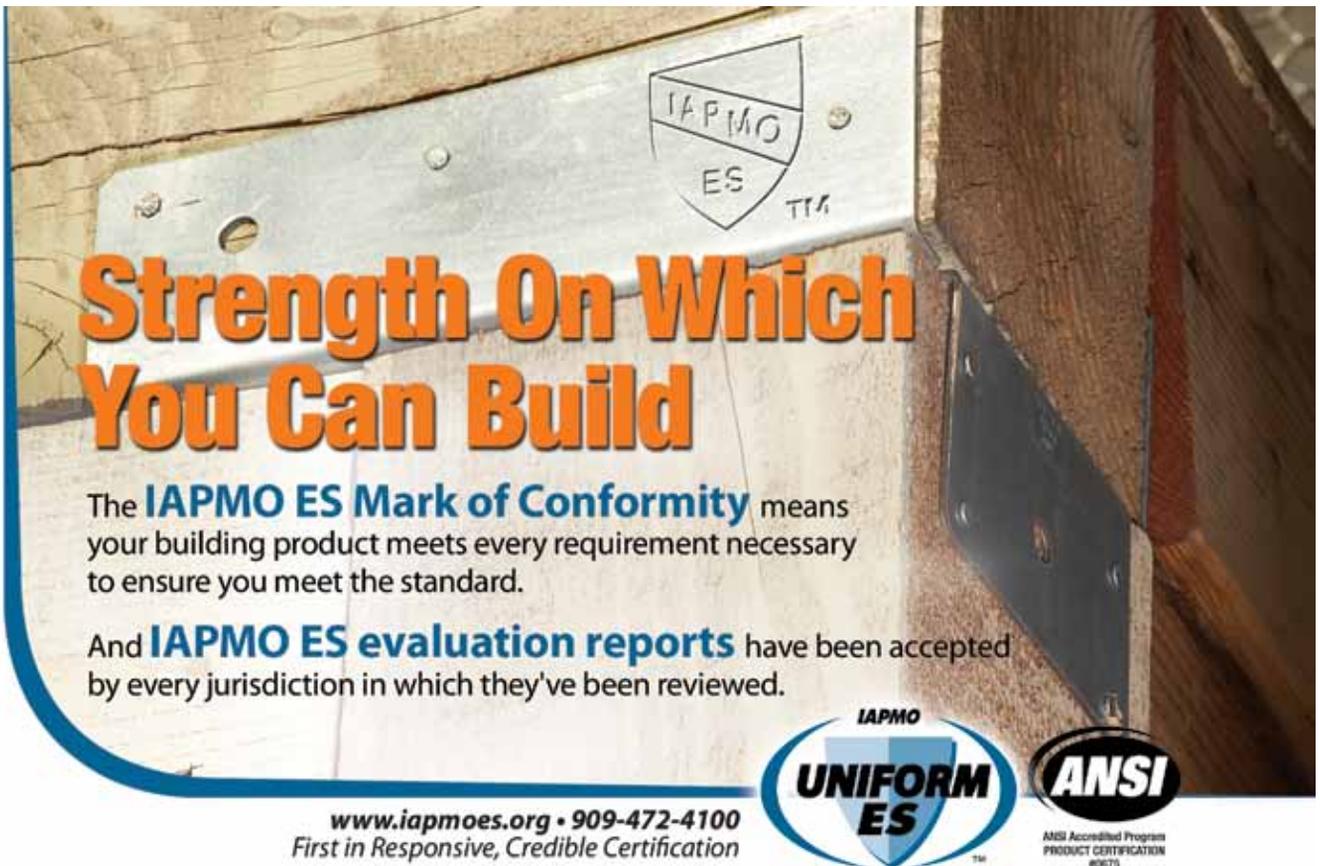
the process whereby structural engineers currently practicing are transitioned into the new practice restrictions as simple and wide-open as possible. This issue can make the difference in getting the support that you need to get this Bill passed. Keep in mind that the intention is to 'raise the bar' so that all engineers who come after us will be better qualified to protect the safety, health and welfare of the public.

### Develop a Writing/PR Campaign

Have your talking points and one-page support material ready so that you can start getting the word out. Do not overlook any and every opportunity – newspapers, radio, television, magazines, community functions, etc. Focus on what is in it for the viewer, reader, or listener. Emphasize the reasons why the layperson should care, and be sure that your message is one that everyone can understand – the safety, health and welfare of the public.

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### Be Willing to Negotiate

The single best way to get your Bill passed is to be willing to negotiate. Trying to hold the line and refusing to give an inch is a sure way to get the Bill killed. By including everything in the original Bill, you have left room for negotiations so that the Bill still has some meat when it is finally passed.

### Rally the Troops

Take every opportunity to get the entire membership of the Structural Engineers Association and other professional organizations involved – newsletter articles, frequent emails, calling trees, social media, regular meetings, etc. Be specific and direct so that the message is clear and understood. In every communication, emphasize the objective: To protect the safety, health and welfare of the public in all that we do.

### Identify the Detractors

Who are the opponents and why? Determining who is against the issue and understanding what their objections are will make it possible for you to develop arguments to counter their comments. Can any of your opponents be

turned into proponents? Take time to visit with the groups who oppose your measure and fully understand why they object. Will they be a dissenting voice when this Bill comes up for review, or do they just not understand why you are making this change? If they cannot be swayed to support your position, can they be neutralized so that they do not oppose it? Look for support in areas that are not patently obvious.

### Fight Back

There will be shots from all sides: the rule makers (why change something that appears to be working?), the licensing board (why make our job more difficult?), other professionals (why is it necessary to change a process that works?), other engineers (why is it important to separate the practice of structural engineering?). Fully understanding the importance of what you are trying to do, and why, will give you the ammunition that you need to stand up and fight back. The change will never happen unless and until you are willing to defend your position and fight for what you want. Keep in mind that you are doing this for the health, safety and welfare of the public.

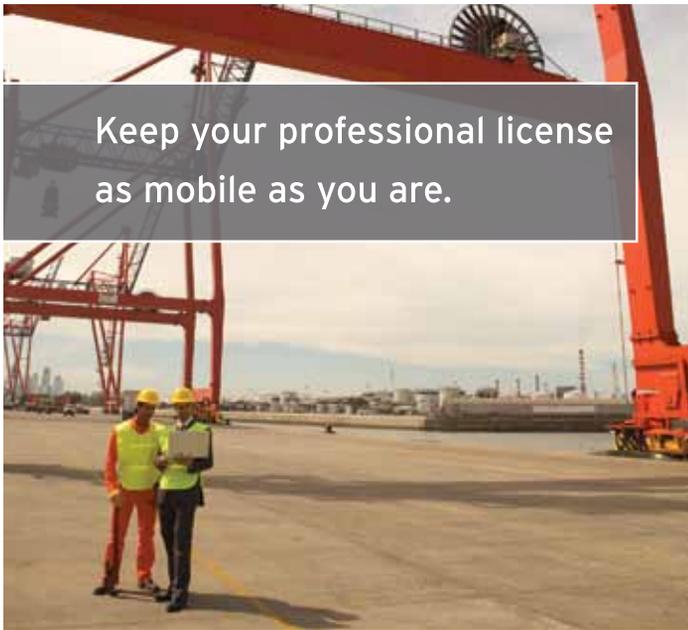
## Conclusions

Separating licensing of structural engineers and restrictions of practice are necessary to help protect the safety, health and welfare of the public. The steps to implement these types of changes are the same from state to state; however, the order and manner in which they are utilized may vary. Whatever it takes to get there, the way to safer structures is the ethical duty of all of us, and it is our responsibility to take the steps to accomplish this goal.

Several states have been successful at implementing change and more are currently in the process. The NCSEA Licensing Committee ([www.ncsea.com](http://www.ncsea.com)) has a wealth of resources and information that can be beneficial. Reach out for help and guidance to ensure your success.■

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