



Licensing Structural Engineers in Every Jurisdiction

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The guiding principle of the NCSEA Licensing Committee is: "Through the member organizations, the licensing committee seeks to influence states, in the interest of public safety, to adopt consistent licensing laws, especially concerning separate licensing of structural engineers." As the chair for the Licensing Committee, I have given this statement considerable thought as to just what I think it means.

Does it mean that every jurisdiction should license structural engineers separately from other engineering disciplines? Yes. Should the requirements for licensing structural engineers be similar in every jurisdiction? Yes. Will the practice designation in every state be the same? Not necessarily.

The primary reason for licensing structural engineers separately is to help ensure the health, safety and well-being of the public. By making the licensing requirements for structural engineers more rigorous than for other engineering disciplines, we are striving to make certain that those responsible for designing the "bones" of structures understand the complex behavior of materials, as well as the extensive and ever-expanding codes and standards to which we are required to adhere.

If, in addition, we are able to make the requirements for licensing structural engineers similar in each jurisdiction, we will also make it

easier for professionals to work in numerous states and maintain multiple licenses. In this day and age, it is rare for an engineer to practice in only one jurisdiction for his or her entire career. Most clients seek opportunities in multiple states, and an increasing number have projects outside the United States.

In 2005, NCSEA started a program of structural engineering certification in an effort to provide a means for those who have met the NCEES Model Law Structural Engineer requirements to be recognized accordingly. The program is fully funded by fees collected from certificants and is directed by an independent Board of Directors including professional and public members. Past public members have included representatives of the insurance industry, architects, and regulators. As one of its goals, the program seeks



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to establish a profession-determined set of requirements for the practice of structural engineering. Until June 1, 2008, licensed engineers who meet certain education and experience requirements can qualify for certification by "grandfathering". After June 1, 2008, the only means of obtaining certification will be through the Regular Process, which requires passing the NCEES SE I and SE II exams and meeting certain experience requirements.

Maintenance of certification requires continuing to practice in the profession and providing evidence of ongoing, meaningful continuing education. The requirements for certification renewal are more stringent than licensure renewal in most states. Nonetheless, SECB certification is not a substitute for licensure, and SECB certificants must still obtain licensure from the jurisdictions in which they practice.

The U.S. Constitution grants individual states the right to govern the practice of the professionals that work in their jurisdictions, simply by not specifically reserving this authority for the Federal Government. Therefore, we must understand that the specific laws regulating practice will likely vary from one state to another. As each Structural Engineers Association investigates the rules, regulations and statutes that govern the licensing of engineers in its state(s), its leaders will have to decide "where to draw the line". As those who have been through this process can attest, concessions and compromise may be necessary. The important point to remember is that we are working to protect the public better; and how we go about this will likely vary from state to state. As we have already seen, some states will elect to implement a full practice restriction for structural engineers (e.g., Illinois and Hawaii), while other states will decide that the best solution is a partial practice restriction (as was recently passed in Utah).

The Licensing Committee of NCSEA supports all efforts to improve the licensing and practice of structural engineers and is available to aid all jurisdictions in their efforts to obtain separate licensing. Please let the committee know how we can help.

For more information, see the Licensing Committee web page on the NCSEA website (www.NCSEA.org) and check out our new Blog (<http://www.se4licensing.blogspot.com>).

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