



A Practice Act for Structural Engineering in Florida

The Florida Structural Engineers Association
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Summary of Proposed Practice Act for Structural Engineering in Florida

- The bar will be raised to require a higher standard and increase the public's safety in the structural design of Threshold Buildings.
- Current professional engineers competent and qualified to practice structural engineering will continue to do so.
- A one-year transition period will allow professional engineers to apply for structural engineering licensure.
- The administrative changes for the Florida Board of Professional Engineers (FBPE) will be minimal.

Proposed Practice Act for Structural Engineering in Florida

The current Florida law concerning the practice of structural engineering does not define which structures or buildings require design by a structural engineer.

A proposal by the Florida Structural Engineers Association (FSEA) would better define the practice of structural engineering by explicitly stating which buildings or structures have the complexity and are of significant importance to the life, safety and welfare of the public to warrant the added expertise of licensed structural engineers.

The International Building Code, which is the basis of the Florida Building Code, classifies structures according to their occupancy with the intent of requiring increased care in the design of certain structures. Hospitals, schools, and buildings housing large numbers of occupants are deemed important and the code requirements for their design are consequently elevated.

The type of structures referenced above are among those defined in the proposed Practice Act for Structural Engineering.

Why is a Practice Act for Structural Engineering necessary?

With the adoption of the 2010 Florida Building Code, Florida is continuing to provide for the safety of its people. State hurricane wind-force requirements continue to increase as does the complexity of the structures to be designed. To maintain the integrity of the design of buildings and other structures, higher levels of competency and design experience are necessary.

Reasons to improve the structural engineering practice include:

- **Engineering Education Requirements:** Bachelor of Science degree requirements have steadily decreased from a high of 150 semester hours to as little as 124 semester hours resulting in the reduction of core structural engineering courses.
- **Complex Codes:** Structural engineering design and building code requirements have become increasingly complex.
- **Computerization:** The use of advanced design software by less qualified engineers to design structures is not in the public's best interest.
- **Hidden Problems in Existing Buildings:** Many potential problems will only be evident when a hurricane wind load is applied. This can result in loss of life and excessive property damage.
- **Insurance Costs:** Poor design and construction can affect many different insurance policies and ultimately the public and consumers.
- **Design Efficiency:** A structure can be designed to be safe and meet the building code, however not be structurally efficient.
- **Plan Review:** Many jurisdictions do not have the resources to perform adequate structural plan reviews. An S.E. seal on a set of documents will provide a level of assurance that a safe, quality structure has been designed.

How will the Practice Act affect currently licensed professional engineers?

Professional engineers presently qualified and competent in the areas defined by the Act will continue to be able to practice structural engineering. They will not be affected at all as long as they submit their application to the FBPE for review together with an affidavit attesting to their competency and experience.

How will it be implemented?

Assuming this bill passes during the 2015 Legislative Session, the implementation plan will be as follows: beginning January 1, 2016, those professional engineers licensed in Florida, and those E.I.'s who have taken their P.E. exam but have not yet received notification of passage, will have a 12-month transition period to make application to the Florida Board of Professional Engineers (FBPE) to obtain their additional S.E. license. After January 2017, licensing as a structural engineer in Florida will follow the requirements established by the state through the Act and administered by the FBPE.

What are the benefits of a Practice Act for Structural Engineering?

- Increased public safety for the structural design of buildings and structures.
- Clear definition of the responsibilities for the practice of structural engineering.
- Improvements of the standards established by the state for the practice of structural engineering and the qualifications of its license holders.

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