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## Our Insular World

We should get out more. No, I don't mean out in the field, although that may also be appropriate. I mean out into the stream of commerce where our products are used. Have you ever examined what you do from the perspective of your clients?

I had an attorney ask me why it was that bollards were in the middle of the street on one of our surveys. Assuring her that no bollards threatened traffic in the area, I wondered where she had gotten that idea. It turned out she had confused our "break balls," which we place at the end of every boundary course, with bollards, which existed elsewhere on the site, and thus appeared in the Legend. Since the boundary ran to the center of the street on that project,

Not so to our reader; they don't live in our insular world. We have little control over how our products are interpreted, and can hardly blame them for taking our Legend at face value. By placing ourselves in our client's shoes and examining our processes, we stand a much better chance of rendering a usable (and understandable) service. We've since changed our symbol for bollards.

When we lose focus on what is important to our clients, we run the risk of veering off on tangents that consume resources to no effect. Positional accuracy in ALTA surveys (hereafter, "posacc") is a good example. Has it ever occurred to you that *no one except surveyors cares about this*? Really. (And only few surveyors at that.) A

### Expectations

Clients expect a survey to be perfectly accurate and perfectly precise. These unattainable goals have never been satisfied in any survey, anywhere. Why, then, have we not had malpractice lawsuits continually? After all, it would be easy to demonstrate that client expectations do not include errors, yet all surveys have them. The reason, of course, is that there are no consequences of producing these less-than-perfect surveys (I'm setting aside boundary problems here). Think about that. We know that we cannot produce perfect measurements (and never have been able to do so), and thus any dependent survey is less than perfect. The real estate community has not been harmed by this fact. Surveys have been "good enough."

And there lies the crux of the subject. Why develop standards to ensure against a non-existent risk?

I have never had a layman ask me about the accuracy of the planimetric features we show on our plats, nor have I ever heard of that happening. Yet, some apparently think that those features are at risk of misplacement on the drawing, and thus standards are necessary to ensure their accuracy. At least I hope so. Surely those involved in the development of the standard considered the miscellaneous planimetric features littering every site and thoughtfully concluded that the standard must apply to those objects...Right?

### Why Not?

Logically, one might ask if "measuring up" to a particular standard is a bad thing. And it's not, looked at in a vacuum. But we do not operate in a vacuum. There are real world consequences associated with expending too

## Why develop standards to ensure against a non-existent risk?

break balls were drawn in the center of the paving. It never occurred to us that the symbol for bollards was identical to our break balls. We had a good laugh at our offices about that, but *we* were the ones at fault. In our insular world there was no confusion: the context of the plat itself constrained our interpretation, and subconsciously informed us that circles within boundary lines were not physical objects, but were instead part of the *panache* we attempted to infuse into the plat.

solution desperately in search of a problem, posacc has been thrust upon the title surveying community at large when there was no outcry for it, largely a result of dissatisfaction from some quarters over the old traverse spec tables, coupled with the proliferation of GPS.

I was never a fan of those ALTA traverse tables either, and I view the discarding of the classes of survey as an especially good move, although it was probably done for the wrong reasons.

much time building a product, without a commensurate increase in the product's value. If our plat is to be drawn on a 50-scale, does it matter that every water valve in the middle of the site be located to the nearest 0.10 of a foot? Who would care, either way?

There is nothing wrong, of course, with standards that reflect the actual requirements of use. In other words, accuracy standards associated with bridge construction reflect the realities of steel fitting, and they should. Measurements that fail tolerances result in steel members that cannot be attached correctly—a costly mistake. Likewise, many government programs require that initial surveys be of a certain caliber because subsequent uses would fail if it were not so.

So where is the analysis concluding that title insurance surveys require tolerances not exceeding 0.07 feet plus 50 parts per million *for every object in the survey*? Not just the traverse here, folks, but “any point on the survey relative to any other point on the same survey at the 95 percent confidence level.” Perhaps I'm missing something here, but that water valve above which is to be shown only graphically, qualifies as “an object.” Who was in the room when this was decided?

The problem with forcing any population to jump through hoops prior to convincing them of the importance of those hoops, is that they will view them as an unnecessary interference with their operations, and seek ways around (or ignore) them. There will never be any enforcement of these provisions, and there will never be any consequence to our clients as a result.

I would be the last to suggest that boundaries in the wrong place are harmless, and the last to suggest that surveyors should not be held accountable for them. But the ALTA standards expressly recognize that boundaries are impacted by factors other than measurements (which is very true). So, although boundary misplacement remains a problem, the posacc solution sidesteps it.

This sounds to me like a bollard in the middle of the street. Are our clients being served by this? Step up to the plate, NSPS, and explain this or correct it. 