

open letter: response

The Fire Alarm

Dear Mr. Cheves:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is David H. Widmer, P.L.S. and I am currently the President of the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES). I am an emeritus member of the Pennsylvania Licensing Board after serving for 18 ½ years and have been involved with NCEES for the past 23 years. The purpose of my letter is to dispute some information contained in your editorial mentioned above.

First off, NCEES has absolutely nothing to do with any proposed legislation in Idaho to do away with experience prior to licensing. That goes against our three legged stool test of education, experience and examination. The Idaho Board is a member board of NCEES but what they do legislatively within Idaho is their business, and their business alone. It ultimately may effect licensure by comity for their licensees with other jurisdictions but they have not consulted with NCEES nor has NCEES provided any input in their discussions.

Secondly, our Position Statement 33 or Mission Statement is as follows:

“The mission of NCEES is to advance licensure for engineers and surveyors in order to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of the public. As such, the Council is committed to promoting and will promote the value of licensure to all audiences.”

Although the “selling” of examinations is part of what NCEES does, that is only a portion. It is through our thousands of professional volunteers that the examinations are created, checked and re-checked before being administered. We serve as a national voice for all 70 of our member boards and at each of our annual meetings, all issues before the council are discussed,

debated and acted on. Created in 1920, the main purpose initially was mobility of engineers. In 1989, NCEE had a name change to incorporate surveying in the name, thus NCEES. This was a major step for surveying licensing boards.

Today, the NCEES Board of Directors consists of three professional surveyors, four professional engineers and one dual licensee with a Ph. D. Surveyors have made tremendous strides in NCEES over the past thirty years. We have won some battles,

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lost some battles and know what battles we should walk away from. I just so happen to be only the third President of NCEES who is a professional surveyor in the 95 year history of NCEES.

Before I go into a discussion on charges to NCEES committees, I need to lay some ground work on how the Council operates. The Council has 12 standing committees and currently one task force. Each year the President-Elect develops charges for his term as President. These charges or tasks are assigned to appropriate committees for their discussion, study and report. Many charges go nowhere with a “No Action” recommendation. Many others lead to changes in the model law and model rules to make

them model documents that may or may not fit every particular states legislation.

The charge assigned to the Examination for Professional Surveyors (EPS) Committee relative to the early taking of the surveying exam was a recommendation based upon the Council approval of the early taking of the PE exam for engineering interns prior to the required 4 years of experience. The 4 years of experience is still required for licensure but the exam can be passed prior to gaining the experience. Not all jurisdictions believe this is the correct way to go but some jurisdictions have been permitting this for years. I drafted the charge to the EPS committee so that our documents were clear on how the early taking of the Professional Surveying (PS) exam should be addressed in our model documents since it was currently silent on this issue. It is my understanding that a recommendation will be forthcoming in August at our annual meeting that the early taking of the PS exam prior to the required experience being obtained will not be recommended and documents will be modified to reflect this.

Finally, the issue of the state specific exams needs to be addressed. As you know, in 2014 NCEES began utilizing what is known as computer based testing (CBT) for the administration of both the FE and FS exams. The Council voted a few years ago to proceed with the PE and PS exams as soon as feasible. The entire reason for going to CBT over the traditional pencil and paper examinations was for security reasons. The delivery method currently being used has greatly improved the entire process with results being made available to candidates in less than two weeks of taking the exam. That being said, NCEES has nothing to do with the individual state specific surveying

exams. As NCEES moves forward in the very near future with CBT for the PS exam, the missing link is the state specific surveying exam. The cost for each state to create a CBT exam for their portion is not feasible. That being said, I felt we needed to look at different ways to handle this situation.

A study done a few years ago found that even though there are at least fifty different state specific surveying exams, almost 90% of the questions are the same on every exam, or at least they contain a similar question. I created the Future of Surveying Task Force to look at this issue along with the declining numbers of licensed surveyors and the ability to meet the surveying needs of the public in the very near future. The current average age of a professional surveyor is almost 60 years old. I tasked this special task force with thinking outside the box to develop strategies to meet those needs as well as to increase mobility for surveyors, which currently is non-existent without additional testing. The thought of a regional state specific exam is just an idea that may help with the overall cost to address the CBT issue when the PS exam begins. Engineers have mobility, they can apply for licensure in almost any jurisdiction and if they passed the FE and PE exam, they can obtain a license by comity. They do not always have to take a state specific exam on local laws or ordinances, they are considered a professional and they have to perform their due diligence as they work in a geographic area they are not familiar with.

For those professional surveyors who work in geographic areas such as I (and I am from a Colonial state) where you reside in one state but can be in several others in less than 15 minutes driving time, is performing surveying across the state border really all that different? Can I not perform my due diligence before doing a job in another state without taking a state specific exam once I have already proven my professional status? Our various state licensing boards all think their exams are the "best" and that without taking the "best" exam and passing it, you are not qualified. This parochial thinking should have gone away years ago but unfortunately it has not.

The recommendations from the Future of Surveying Task Force have not been finalized nor do I know if they will be finalized this year based upon the work ahead of them but we need to always

think outside the box to try to solve these upcoming problems. If the recommendation is that each state must still administer a state specific surveying exam, and the NCEES body approves this recommendation, then we can chalk this one up as a failed attempt but at least we can say we studied the problem. No harm, no foul but we solved nothing and the state specific exam issue is still present.

Finally, let me be very clear on one thing, we are not "watering down" the requirements to become a professional surveyor nor has that ever been discussed. We continue to strive to have the best exams to test for minimal competency that safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the public! ■

David H. Widmer, P.L.S.

2014-2015 President

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