

Certification

The Final Vote Is Still Out

By: John Joyce, NCSEA President



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On December 15, 2003, the NCSEA Delegates approved a Position Statement in favor of a certification program for structural engineers. This affirmative vote authorized the NCSEA Board to establish a structural engineering certification program administrative body, and appoint the initial members of that body. The NCSEA Board is expected to name those individuals at the January 22 Board meeting preceding the Winter Institute, and the actual certification program will then begin.

According to NCSEA Bylaws, a "Position Statement" must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, with at least 75% of the Delegates voting. The ballot results were as follows: 22 Member Organizations voted in favor of certification, 11 voted against, two member organizations abstained, and two failed to vote prior to the December 15th deadline.

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In my opinion, most structural engineers believe that separate licensure, for structural engineers in all jurisdictions, is the ultimate goal of the profession. NCSEA formally adopted this position by a roll call vote of the delegates at the 1998 Annual Conference in Seattle. Although there is some disagreement as to whether certification is a positive step toward obtaining this goal, the polling of NCSEA Member Organizations revealed some interesting information with respect to jurisdictions that already have separate licensing. Not all of these jurisdictions dismissed certification. For example, the Board of Directors of the Structural Engineers Association of California voted unanimously to approve the certification program. Hawaii, Arizona and Nevada joined California in embracing certification as a means to supplement their existing state laws. I was particularly impressed by the ballot from Utah, another SE state, on which the Utah delegate wrote: "As you know, Utah already has a Structural Engineer Title Act in place. However, I believe engineers, voluntarily caring for their

own profession and the public's safety and welfare, actually will produce a higher standard of proficiency than that which the government can regulate."

In my discussions with individual SEA members, including several in my home state of Oklahoma, I was asked some very specific questions about the proposed certification process. "Will there be a requirement of ABET certification for degree-granting universities?" "What, if any, will the grandfathering requirements be?" "Who will write the required test and how many parts will there be?" As engineers, we all want the details before making a decision. I believe the absence of definite answers to these types of questions may have been responsible for a number of the negative votes received. Of course, a lot of specific information has been presented, including the final report of the NCSEA Certification Committee and the proposed business plan by the NCSEA Past Presidents Committee. However, the NCSEA Board held fast to the belief that, if the governing body was to be truly independent, the certification program administrative body would have to determine the specifics of the certification program. Now the votes are in, the specifics of the program will come next, and the questions will be answered. The final "vote" will soon begin.

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Every structural engineer will get a chance to "vote" on the issue when he or she decides whether or not to become certified. Managing partners will choose if they want "certified engineers" to fill vacancies within their firm. In the preparation of construction documents, the engineer of record will decide whether to specify that "certified engineers" must perform the work on construction-related product submittals. Private and public entities, governing bodies and various local jurisdictions will determine whether "certified engineers" will complete their projects. It is this "voting", open to all of us as individuals, that will determine if the concept of certification is ultimately successful. ■