



## Should Continuing Education Requirements Be Mandatory?

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The issue of mandatory continuing education (MCE) requirements for engineers is controversial because some feel it questions the character of the professional as it relates to self motivation in the pursuit of practice-oriented lifelong learning. In addition, some question the effectiveness of states' mandatory continuing education requirements in ensuring continuing professional competency. Being a professional implies commitment to continually advancing ones knowledge, therefore eliminating the necessity for a mandate. However, due to evolving technology, advances in research, as well as the public demand for accountability, the number of states requiring continuing education has consistently increased. Currently, 33 of 55 U.S. licensing boards mandate continuing education as a requirement for license renewal. In addition, the Structural Engineering Certification Board requires completion of continuing education for recertification.

Continuing education requirements are fulfilled by completion of Professional Development Hours (PDH). A PDH is one contact hour of instruction or presentation. The licensee is responsible for maintaining records verifying that the licensing board's requirements have been met. The method for attaining acceptable continuing education varies greatly between various licensing boards. For example, the State of New York requires courses to be administered by an approved provider, and only in approved subject areas. Some boards also require PDH's in ethics, while others require courses related to the rules of the local licensing board.

Among the primary arguments in opposition of MCE requirements are the following:

- Professionals by definition are to be autonomous, self managed, and individually responsible.
- The only requirement that is mandated is attendance, which will not necessarily change one's determination to practice responsibly or motivation to continually learn.
- Programs are not consistent and lack quality and relevance, thereby not meeting practitioner needs.

Proponents support MCE for the following reasons:

- Expecting voluntary participation is unrealistic. Those who may benefit the most are often the least likely to participate.

State/Territory	PDHs Required
Alabama	15 annual
Alaska	None
Arizona	None
Arkansas	15 annual
California	None
Colorado	None
Connecticut	None
Delaware	None
District of Columbia	None
Florida	8 annual
Georgia	30 biennial
Guam	None
Hawaii	None
Idaho	None
Illinois	30 biennial
Indiana	None
Iowa	30 biennial
Kansas	30 biennial
Kentucky	8 annual
Louisiana	30 annual
Maine	30 biennial
Maryland	None
Massachusetts	None
Michigan	None
Minnesota	24 biennial
Mississippi	15 annual
Missouri	30 biennial
Montana	30 biennial
Nebraska	30 biennial
Nevada	30 biennial
New Hampshire	30 biennial
New Jersey	None
New Mexico	30 biennial
New York	36 triennial
North Carolina	15 annual
North Dakota	30 biennial
Northern Mariana Islands	None
Ohio	15 annual
Oklahoma	30 biennial
Oregon	30 biennial
Pennsylvania	24 biennial
Puerto Rico	None
Rhode Island	None
South Carolina	30 biennial
South Dakota	30 biennial
Tennessee	24 biennial
Texas	15 annual
Utah	24 biennial
Vermont	None
Virginia	16 biennial
Virgin Islands	None
Washington	None
West Virginia	15 annual
Wisconsin	None
Wyoming	30 biennial

- Evolving technology, advances in research, and changes in codes, standards and regulations require ongoing development of individual knowledge and skills. The comprehension of these developments is critical in maintaining quality services and protecting the public.
- MCE is a more agreeable alternative to periodic re-examination.

MCE is in effect in many professional fields, including medicine, law and architecture. These fields adopted MCE to meet consumer expectations, add credibility to the profession, and instill confidence to consumers. Engineers must follow suit. With the ongoing trend toward legislating MCE, the question should not be whether continuing education for professional engineers should be mandated, but how it can be effectively delivered. To truly be effective, uniform standards should be developed for course content and magnitude, and specific learning outcomes should be established for all continuing education programs.

As with licensure, the goal in implementing MCE requirements should be to have consistency between licensing boards, so that there are no constraints in obtaining reciprocity between licensing boards and uncertainty in fulfilling an individual board's renewal requirements.

Continuing education programs must be customized to meet uniform standards, such as International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) requirements, to assure the relevancy of the course and that suitable programs are developed and updated on a consistent basis. Such standards will ensure uniformity in content and provide a means for assessing comprehension. Programs such as NCEES' *Registered Continuing Education Providers Program* are helpful to engineering professionals as a means of providing record keeping of attained PDH's, as well as licensing boards that could use the program to verify that continuing education requirements have been accomplished.

While MCE should not be viewed as the sole solution to verify competency, it should be required as part of license renewal. Mandating continuing education is not an infringement on individual freedom. It should become part of the standards of the profession. ■