

One-Voice Initiative... it is Working!

By Greg Robinson, NCSEA President

Structural engineers continue to be challenged in many areas. Each state, plus the US territories and the District of Columbia, has its own laws regulating the practice of engineering, making registration in multiple states complex. Further complicating the matter, these states have different continuing education requirements for those licensed in the profession. Finally, engineers may believe that they have complied with continuing education requirements for a state, only to find out later that an unauthorized provider gave the credits.

Building code proposals are now published in multiple volumes, making deliberations a lengthy and complex process. Standards development organizations are not always on the same publishing time line as the model building codes, leaving the engineer frustrated. Trade organizations and structural engineers may not be in full agreement as to design responsibilities, which is most evident when manufactured components are specified on the drawings and field issues develop, due to less than concise specifications and conflicts with trade publications. These are just a few of the issues that structural engineers are faced with, indicating a need for a one-voice initiative. However, there are success stories. Success stories where structural engineers are coming together with a single voice and leading others.

The Structural Engineering Certification Board is one example of the one-voice initiative at work for structural engineers. The SECB mission statement is multi-part. The first part is that the SECB will determine the level of unique and additional education, examination and experience necessary to perform the science and art of structural engineering. This mission is in common with many, if not all, of the state licensure board's requirements to regulate the practice of engineering. The second part of the SECB mission statement is to provide a common national process for structural engineers to become certified. Herein lies the biggest difference between licensure boards and the SECB, a true example of a one-voice initiative at work for structural engineers. By providing a national process, multi-state licensed engineers can focus on meeting the requirements of one organization acceptable to many jurisdictions. To date, the SECB has not been accepted as a credentialing organization for any of the state licensure boards. Only the time and efforts of the many volunteers comprising the SECB will bring that to reality. However, structural engineers must have a 100% buy-in that this is the correct path, to lead to uniform licensure and uniform requirements to practice structural engineering.

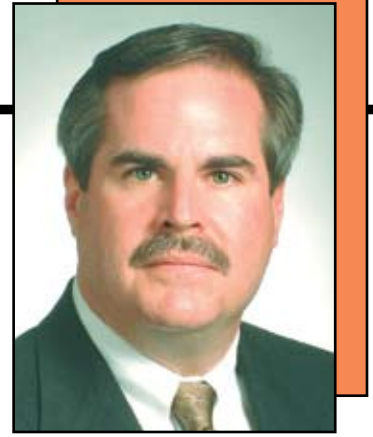
Continuing education is a common topic discussed among engineers licensed in multiple states. States requiring continuing education have many and various requirements. Some states require ethics courses; others allow only technical seminars as acceptable continuing education. Some states acknowledge business topics as being acceptable continuing education courses; others require that providers of con-

tinuing education be approved. The NCSEA Diamond Review Program will ultimately assist engineers in obtaining quality educational programs that are acceptable in most jurisdictions, especially as it moves toward participating with local Structural Engineering Associations to insure that structural engineers have reliable and approved providers of that education.

One of the most impressive examples of a one-voice initiative may be found in NCSEA's efforts to pull together a multi-industry committee, to respond to the NIST World Trade Center recommendations. NCSEA organized the ad hoc Joint Industry Committee on Structural Integrity, to address code changes that had been proposed for the 2007 IBC Supplement by the ICC Terrorism Resistant Buildings Committee. It was acknowledged that code provisions related to structural integrity could be appropriate, but it was also felt that the proposals submitted were not well-conceived. Delegates from Structural Engineering Associations across the country weighed in at the NCSEA Annual Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah, and provided feedback on some of the issues that the Joint Industry Committee on Structural Integrity is facing. The committee, chaired by Ron Hamburger of NCSEA, is now working toward improved code change proposals for the 2009 IBC. Plans are to have the committee meet several times a year to address the need for general structural integrity criteria for all buildings, giving special consideration to iconic structures.

The NCSEA Code Advisory Committee (CAC) continues its efforts toward the one-voice initiative. One of the primary missions of the CAC is to prepare code change proposals and review code change proposals prepared by others. The CAC is also there to help coordinate and unify code change proposals prepared by structural engineers in member organizations. Often, code change proposals may be prepared with only local considerations in mind. If adopted however, the changes will affect all jurisdictions. The diversity of the CAC helps to bring regional concerns to the table and address them before issues develop at hearings. In addition, the CAC moves the one-voice initiative forward by working with the standards development organizations and trade organizations, to meet the needs of the structural engineer and other industry representatives. (For more on recent CAC activities, see page 84 of this issue.)

The one-voice initiative is needed. It is working and has the opportunity for growth. The above represents just a few examples of structural engineers working with government, the public, and other industries to advance the practice of structural engineering and protect the public's right to safe, sustainable and cost effective buildings, bridges and other structures. ■



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