

Editorial | Structural Engineering Licensure Coalition

By Susan Jorgensen, P.E., NCSEA Treasurer



The pursuit of structural licensure in every jurisdiction is a challenge. It means getting all the stakeholders behind it, convincing the licensing board that it is in the best interest of the public, understanding the legislative process, gaining support from legislators to get the bill sponsored and passed, and making sure that the state governor will sign it. In addition to these daunting tasks, there are always those who do not see the benefits of structural licensure and some can be vocal about their opinion.

One of the recurring arguments is the fact that there are four separate structural engineering professional organizations – NCSEA, CASE, SEI, and SECB – with varying opinions on the details of structural licensure. It is not a valid argument, but it was hard to convince our opponents of that. In June 2012, individuals from these organizations, adamant about pursuing structural licensure in every state, came together to form the Structural Engineering Licensure Coalition (SELC). The mission of this initiative is to “serve as a unified voice for the structural engineering profession for the promotion of structural engineering licensure.”

The coalition is led by a steering committee made up of two representatives, and an optional alternate, from each of the four organizations. The committee meets in person at the spring SEI Structures Congress and the fall NCSEA Structural Engineering Summit with the goal to further the efforts of developing structural licensure in each jurisdiction.

I have been helping to lead such efforts on behalf of NCSEA for almost ten years. The concern is that there are still many in our profession who do not understand the importance of what we are trying to accomplish, and are not providing support for the local Member Organizations (MOs). With an eye toward rectifying the situation, SELC has adopted the following positions:

- 1) SELC endorses the Model Law Structural Engineer (MLSE) standard developed by the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) as establishing the minimum set of qualifications for a licensed Structural Engineer (S.E.).
- 2) SELC advocates that jurisdictions require S.E. licensure for anyone who provides structural engineering services for designated structures. SELC recommends that each licensing board adopt rules to define appropriate thresholds for these structures.
- 3) SELC recognizes that, when S.E. licensure is enacted in each jurisdiction, it is important to ensure that an equitable transition process, as defined by the licensing board, is available for any individual who has been practicing structural engineering as a licensed Professional Engineer (P.E.).
- 4) SELC encourages all jurisdictions to incorporate these provisions into their current engineering licensure laws, adapting them to their unique individual situations. SELC supports the modification of existing P.E. statutes and regulations to implement S.E. licensure as a post-P.E. credential.

In simple terms, we want to establish licensure of structural engineers that recognizes qualifications already established, is required only for the design of structures designated by each licensing board, provides for an equitable transition process for professionals already licensed and practicing structural engineering, and works within the current engineering licensing laws. It is our sincere belief that the best way to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public is to restrict the design of certain structures – perhaps defined by height, area, or other criteria that reflect increased risk – to those who are focused *entirely* on designing structures.

The structural engineering community has long realized the complexity of our profession, working with NCEES to develop the 16-hour Structural Engineering Principles & Practice Examination. The former SE I and SE II exams, as well as a few state-specific exams, were attempts to measure structural engineering proficiency beyond the four-hour structural module of the Civil Engineering exam. The two-day exam, first offered in 2011, tests the practitioner’s experience and understanding of both lateral and vertical force-resisting systems – essential to the design of safe structures.

Tim Gilbert, the chair of the Structural Engineers Association of Ohio (SEAO) Licensure Committee, has written a number of excellent articles for their newsletter in support of structural licensure. In his article from February 2015, entitled *Second Order Effects and Structural Licensure*, he writes, “In the instances where a structural design has the potential for significant impact on the public, we favor a requirement that the engineer has demonstrated sufficient proficiency in structural engineering. Structural licensure would provide a means for engineers to demonstrate proficiency in the subject to the public.”

SELC has developed a website (www.selicensure.org) intended to be a gathering place for information related to structural licensure that may be used as a resource for MOs working on making changes within their states. The site is a work in progress, and we are always looking for more positive and supportive information to include. Should you be looking for any specific information and cannot find it, please contact us.

Although SELC was formed primarily for the pursuit of structural licensure, as we go forward, bringing together the four professional organizations that represent us could serve as an avenue for advocating any number of issues that affect our profession. With that in mind, it is my personal hope that this group will eventually become the Structural Engineering Leadership Coalition. ■



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