Significant Structures
Suggested Language for Partial Practice Restrictions

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The Structural Engineering Licensure Coalition (SELC) consists of representatives from the Council of American Structural Engineers (CASE) of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations (NCSEA), the Structural Engineering Institute (SEI) of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), and the Structural Engineering Certification Board (SECB). SELC has developed a document that provides a model definition for the term “significant structures,” which is used in structural engineering licensure legislation in several states and is being considered by several others to define partial practice restrictions. The national discussion and state-by-state adoption of structural engineering licensure have spurred the need to articulate to the public and authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs) the best practices and industry interest when AHJs work to define partial practice restriction legislation. SELC worked to provide broad guidance with the understanding that each licensing board will be required to judge for itself the definition that best serves its jurisdiction.

The development of professional engineering legislation in the early 1900s established the precedent used by state and local jurisdictions through the ensuing decades to develop laws to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. The licensing of professional engineers serves as a public statement that individuals practicing engineering meet required standards and seeks to prevent incompetent or unethical persons from practicing. As industry and education advance, so do the needs of the profession to adapt to these new circumstances.

The National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) was formed in 1920 to improve the uniformity of laws and to promote mobility of licensure across state lines. To summarize the NCEES mission, they strive to provide outstanding nationally normed examinations, provide uniform model laws and rules for adoption by the member boards, and to promote professional ethics among all engineers. NCEES provides a platform for state licensing boards to interact with the profession and develop a uniform policy that can be adopted by all states as a standard of competence. Nevertheless, state-specific legislation and rules continue to exist, and rules generally follow a similar concept and potential application, though their language varies. More states are looking to adopt the NCEES Model Law and Rules, including the credentials for the Model Law Engineer and Model Law Structural Engineer, because they are seeking greater uniformity. Moreover, more applicants are choosing to take the PE Structural exam with a desire to practice across state lines. The shared goal is health, safety, and welfare protection of the public.

The SELC Significant Structure Model Recommendations are intended to be a guideline. SELC worked to represent general conditions that are currently adopted by AHJs and conditions that are being considered by AHJs who have begun the process of implementing structural engineer licensure. The recommendations cover a wide range of structure types, all of which have specific code requirements and risk implications. The International Building Code (IBC) and ASCE/SEI 17, Minimum Design Loads and Associated Criteria for Buildings and Other Structures, were the basis in conjunction with various existing statutes and rules. The document addresses both vertical and horizontal structures.

SELC envisions this document being used in multiple ways by AHJs, legislatures, practicing engineers, educators, and students with the general idea of providing a format for uniformity in understanding what a “significant structure” is. A person reading and trying to apply this document to his or her practice can personally decide if gaining the additional credential of S.E. is required. Structural Engineers Associations (SEAs) and other local groups must work with their state licensing boards to review the proposed guidelines and develop rules addressing the relevant needs and challenges by selecting or adapting the specific provisions that best address them.

To review the document, please go to www.selicensure.org.

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