

Editorial | Are You MAD?

By John A. Mercer, P.E., SECB



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Spring is just around the corner, a few short weeks away. Daylight savings time and longer days are already starting, leading us into another year of construction. Actually, in North Dakota construction occurs all year round, unlike the past. New technology has triumphed in breaking frost in the ground so that footing trenches can be dug and concrete can be placed to begin the construction of new buildings and structures. All of this is at a cost, but an oil boom in my part of the world is the motivation to proceed at any cost.

A few weeks ago, CASE had its winter planning meeting in New Orleans. Thirty CASE committee members met to continue the development and improvement of the world class CASE Documents and Tools that are helping CASE firms use best business practices and manage the risk associated with the business of structural engineering.

CASE Excom approved the addition of insurance liaisons to be embedded into CASE committees to add a new dimension of value and credibility to the CASE products. The practical side of managing risk will now be observed by professional liability insurance professionals that will not only see the difference that CASE member firms can make, but who will carry that message back to their insurance underwriters. CASE firms are MAD. Oh I don't mean they are angry, CASE member firms are Making A Difference in their businesses and for their clients.

Once a firm has established itself, it has the potential to make a difference in its community and market area. I believe that structural engineers are best equipped to envision the needs of a community based on their understanding of both design and construction. Certainly the young engineer in training, as it was referred to in my day, needs some experience under his or her belt, but it doesn't take long for them to begin to see how the application of engineering knowledge and practice can be put to work to improve the lives of their fellow man.

Subsequent to the CASE Winter Planning Meeting, NCSEA had its Winter Institute. What a breath of fresh air to hear about the breakwater project that the US Army Corps of Engineers was tasked to complete in record time after Hurricane Katrina. For those of you who were not able to attend, the Corps embedded themselves in the engineering design group in order to speed up the process for the design

build project for the breakwater. The project was designed and constructed in a three-year window, a record for the Corps in constructing a project of this scope and national importance. I can actually say that the Corps is MAD. Congratulations!

Other topics presented included the ASCE 7-10 Wind Design provisions. In case you haven't had an opportunity to implement them yet, we now have three wind maps, each based on a structure's Category. The wind velocities on the maps vary from the past, and now have an Importance Factor incorporated into the Velocities. The new equations therefore don't use the Importance Factor. This is a small change, but one that we can live with. Later, at the end of the presentation during Q&A, we heard that one day there will be two volumes of the ASCE 7 document. The preferred method for calculating the wind pressures will be in Volume 1, and all the alternate or simplified methods that can be used will be in Volume 2. I'll let you guess which Method will be in Volume 1.

The best news going forward is that the ASCE 7 may be going to a six year cycle after the ASCE 7-13 is published. [Now, after you've had a chance to catch your breath after an exhausting round of cheering, send a thank you note to the appropriate people on the ASCE 7 committee.]

Many have survived the down economy of the past few years by making hard choices concerning their business practices, and most important of all about their employees. I think it is time for all structural engineers to take a hard look at both their technical skills and the business practices their firms have been using.

One day soon, the economy will turn around, and you won't have the time to bone up on your skills by attending seminars, or even webinars. You've always looked forward to receiving that paycheck, but what have you done lately to earn it? What a strange question, you say. Not so strange when you want to be giving the best service you can to your clients and your community. That means continuing education should be an important part of your culture, even if your client doesn't appreciate its benefits. Certainly, you will.

What have you been doing in your community lately? Are you MAD?■



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