

Professional Engineering Registration Benefits The Profession, The Public, The Person

T. A. (Tim) Groover, P.E.
President and COO, Wiley|Wilson

127 Nationwide Drive, Lynchburg, VA 24502, tgroover@wileywilson.com

INTRODUCTION

The term “profession” is used quite loosely and is readily applied to a wide variety of situations where the services of an individual are exchanged for something of value; usually money. The term “profession” takes on a whole different meaning when it relates to the formal process of becoming registered or certified as a means of demonstrating a minimum level of competency in order to practice a certain trade. For Professional Engineers, this designation also allows the professional to sign and seal their work which carries with it certain legal and ethical responsibilities.

Engineers within the nuclear industry are not currently required by law to be registered professionals. Requiring or at least encouraging registration would result in benefits to the profession, the public, and the person who attains professional registration.

BODY AND DISCUSSION

Many organizations, societies, and individuals have made the case for professional engineering registration regardless of the field or industry of practice. There are also many who believe that professional registration is not important in industries like the nuclear industry. The most common arguments for this position seem to revolve around the contention that extensive checks and balances already present in the nuclear industry make professional registration unnecessary and essentially add no value.

The discussion then becomes more a matter of personal opinion rather than concrete evidence. Having worked within the nuclear industry as well as within the private construction and engineering consulting fields has given me a balanced perspective of the benefits of professional registration. Accordingly, I believe virtually any case for professional registration can be categorized within the following three “Ps.”

The Profession

The first reason I believe engineers in the nuclear industry should become registered is to demonstrate support for their profession of engineering. Our communities, country, and world are faced with many daunting challenges. Too often, when people in authority gather to discuss these issues, engineers are not even in

the room, much less at the table. Our profession is represented by a handful of key organizations that deserve our strong support so our voices can be heard. These organizations place great importance on professional registration, realizing this is an important way to demonstrate to the outside world that the people representing the engineering profession can be respected in the same way doctors, lawyers, and other professions are respected.

The Public

Virtually everything practicing engineers do in some way affects the public and this is certainly the case for the nuclear industry. The first canon of the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) Code of Ethics is that engineers will “hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public.” One of the fundamental ways to protect the public is to ensure that engineers whose designs impact the public are professionally registered and have been specifically trained on the technical, legal, and ethical responsibilities of being a registered Professional Engineer.

The Person

Finally and I think most importantly, I believe the individual engineer owes it to themselves personally to become professionally registered and should encourage professional registration for any engineer they supervise. We have heard much in recent years of the new mobile workforce. Gone are the days when an engineer could be expected to finish school and then work for one company or even one industry for their entire career. Obtaining professional registration greatly expands career opportunities for engineers. I experienced this personally when I was structural department manager with a private consulting firm in the mid-1980’s. I was a recently registered professional engineer and we had several position openings. I saw countless resumes and letters of interest from engineers within the nuclear industry. Very few of the candidates were registered Professional Engineers, a requirement for any position of responsibility in private consulting. Of those that were not registered but were of the appropriate experience level to sit for the applicable exams, none appeared to be ready to sit for the exam since prior certification as an Engineer-in-Training (EIT) and several years of experience working under the

supervision of a Registered Professional Engineer are both prerequisites to sit for the exam. The end result was that many technically competent engineers in the nuclear industry significantly limited their employment options by not taking the necessary steps towards professional registration.

CONCLUSIONS

Engineers prefer to deal with facts. Unfortunately, there are no conclusive facts that would clearly lead one to deduce that professional registration should be required within the nuclear industry. However, I believe there are three questions that clearly point to the unquestionable benefits of professional registration.

Does the profession of engineering benefit from having nuclear engineers pursue, obtain, and maintain professional registration? Does the public benefit from having the designs for the next generation of nuclear power plants performed and supervised by registered Professional Engineers? Do engineers personally benefit from increased recognition, prestige, and career opportunities through professional registration? I believe the clear answer to all three of these questions is a resounding “YES.”

REFERENCES

1. NSPE Board of Directors, “NSPE Code of Ethics for Engineers,” July 1997 Revision, National Society of Professional Engineers, www.nspe.org/Ethics/CodeofEthics/index.html