

Opening Address by PE Board President Er. Chua Koon Hoe at PEB Day of Dedication 6 Oct 2007

Introduction

The Professional Engineers Act was first enacted in 1970. Registration of Professional Engineers in Singapore under the Act began in 1971. Today, we have 3,419 professional engineers registered with the Professional Engineers Board. 2,080 of these PEs have valid practicing certificates for the current year. Today, we formally welcome our new PEs who successfully registered in the last one year. So, this is a happy occasion for many present. It is also a serious occasion. To underline the dual character of this event, the Professional Engineers Board has decided to give the event a special name and that is, the PEB Day of Dedication.

Before I talk about any thing else, let me congratulate our new batch of Professional Engineers who are here to receive their registration certificates. By registering with the Board, you have earned the right to refer to yourself as a Professional Engineer and put the title Engineer before your name. You have earned yourself the privilege and entitlement to engage in engineering work and services in ways which a non-registered person is forbidden to do. You carry a PE stamp and local authorities such as the BCA, URA, EMA, NEA, FSB etc will only recognize engineers like yourself with the stamp for various works and activities controlled by them. As a licensed PE, you are acknowledged as a person with valuable skills. My message to you is: Have pride in yourself and your chosen profession; do not undervalue yourself and your personal skills.

Next, let me congratulate our 2nd batch of PE(Civil) who are receiving their certificates of registration as Specialist Professional Engineers in Geotechnical Engineering. You are among our pioneers on this, our very first specialist register. You are being recognized for your advanced skills in geotechnical engineering. I have a similar message for you also. Do not undervalue yourself and your special personal skills.

Registration of PE and PE (Geotechnical)

It has been a busy time for the PEB in the last 12 months in terms of processing the registration of PEs and specialist PEs. The last major amendment to the PE Act came into effect in Dec 05. One of the changes requires new applicants for PE registration to first sit and pass 2 examinations - the FEE(Fundamentals of Engineering Examination) and the PPE (Practice of Professional Engineering Examination). Another change provides for the registration of specialist professional engineers in geotechnical engineering and one of the requirements is also the sitting and passing of a prescribed examination in geotechnical engineering.

However, waiver of these exams was offered to those who applied within the prescribed transition period. Many engineers, being smart people that we all are, cleverly responded by flooding and overwhelming the Board with their applications. Thus we received 436 applications for PE registration and 175 applications for specialist PE registration: numbers never seen before.

It was therefore a very busy time for our panels of interviewers, both for PE registration and specialist PE registration. Most of the interview members had to do 2 rounds of interviews and some even more. The number of candidates at each interview session was also increased from the usual 4 candidates to 6. All the applications, save for a few, have now been considered. We want to

thank our interviewers, a number of whom are with us this morning, for assisting the Board to resolve this pleasant crisis.

Going forward, the next batch of new PEs would come from those who made their application after the transition periods. As I have mentioned earlier, for PE applicants, they would have to sit and pass 2 examinations before they could apply to attend the professional interview. Indeed, the first batch of these applicants have already taken their FEE exam in Sep 06, PPE exam in May 07 and some of them have recently submitted their application to register as PE. In the same way, for those who apply for specialist PE registration in geotechnical engineering, they would have to take examination unless they already have higher qualifications in this area.

Competency Standard of PE

Besides passing the prescribed examinations, an applicant for registration must also possess the appropriate qualifications and experience, have good character and reputation, and demonstrate that he has the ability to carry out the duties of a professional engineer effectively. These requirements are clearly prescribed in the Act and rules. An applicant who has met these requirements is deemed to have met the competence standard of a PE.

In an effort to add further clarity to the registration requirements and process, a guide on the competence standard of a PE has been drawn up. However, do note that this guide is not to override any of the provisions in the Act, regulations or rules. The Competence Standard for a Professional Engineer specifies the elements that a competent professional engineer is expected to be able to demonstrate in a holistic way. The competence elements cover management attributes such as: problem analysis, synthesis, implementation, operation, and evaluation, as well as personal attributes relating to

communications, ethical practice, judgment, taking responsibility, and protecting society. Some of you would recognise the similarity with what several other Washington Accord member countries advocate in this matter. The Board is happy to emulate them and give them due credit.

Approved Qualifications

I think it would be of interest for me to mention that the PEB would be reviewing and updating its approved qualifications list to take account of new developments and changing needs, at home as well as overseas. For example, the Board had actively encouraged and supported IES's participation in the Washington Accord. Now that IES has been admitted as a full member of WA, the Board intends to include relevant qualifications accredited under the WA in our approved list, albeit with conditions as the Board deems necessary. Similarly, there would also be qualifications from other non-WA countries that we would consider adding to our approved qualifications list as they prove themselves to be of good standard. Widening the list of approved qualifications while stipulating specific conditions of our own would help the Board to maintain an adequate talent pool of competent professional engineers to serve all stakeholders, including the ultimate and most important stakeholder of professional engineering services, namely, the local general public.

Survey of PEs and Stakeholders

There have been recurring issues facing practicing PEs. For a long time, they relate to concerns such as reward, image and recognition. However, with the strong turn-around in the construction industry, these concerns have, at least for now, taken a somewhat different nature and gravitated towards resource issues such as lack of supporting manpower, rising office rentals etc.

To better appreciate the situation, the Board has decided that it would carry out a broad and in-depth survey to gather feedback from fellow PEs and various stakeholders. We would like to seek the views and comments from every practicing PE on topical issues such as level of fees, fee competition, roles and responsibilities of PEs, image of engineering, etc. The information from the survey and feedback would help the Board get a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges facing the PE community so that the Board could help to address some of the areas of concerns that may be highlighted. Indeed the exercise could also serve the Board in reviewing its purpose, adjusting its direction and prioritizing its programs to meet the needs and expectations of PEs and various stakeholders in future.

Privilege and Responsibilities of a PE

Whilst we do not wish to stagnate in the way we think and do things, there are some enduring values for our profession that we should always treasure and maintain. The most fundamental value is honesty and professional integrity and is manifest in the way we practise with due recognition of the privileges and responsibilities of a PE.

I started this address by mentioning that registration confers upon you the privilege to provide work and services for which a non PE is not allowed to do and for which you are rewarded and recognized accordingly. I would like to remind however that this privilege, the privilege of a PE, comes with responsibility. A primary aspect of this responsibility is about how you do your work. The responsibility of 'how you do your work' is to be discharged in a way that is consistent with the code of conduct and ethics which is part of the set of legislation that PEs are bound.

Very often, the engineering problems, designs, and interactions that Professional Engineers are involved in, have ethical dimensions. The code of conduct and ethics guides the professional engineers to address these dimensions so that they could do 'the right thing'. In general the code addresses the three primary duties of a professional engineer—duty towards society, responsibility towards employer or client, and upholding the dignity, standing and reputation of the engineering profession. We have lined-up a number of eminent speakers to enlarge on these topics after the tea break.

Day of Dedication

Engineering is a noble and learned profession that has a direct and vital impact on the quality of life for all people. Today therefore is an appropriate and significant occasion for newly registered PEs and specialist PEs to pledge and to emphasize the dedication and rededication of their service to society and the profession. As I have mentioned, the PE Board has decided to call today's event the PEB Day of Dedication.

Conclusion

In closing, this is a day that's also meant for our new PEs to celebrate your achievements with family and friends. I wish you all the very best and every success in your future endeavors. Thank you.