

Geoscientists to take “gentle stick” to unlicensed practitioners

by Fawzia Sheikh

The Association of Professional Geoscientists of Ontario (APGO) has attracted 1040 members in less than two years and aims to license remaining geoscience practitioners in the province through a comprehensive campaign. Geoscientists are required to apply for licensing by the association under the *Professional Geoscientists Act*, which defines the practice of geoscience for which licensing is required except under certain exceptions. Yet more than 1500 geoscientists, who provide services ranging from geophysical surveys of earthquake zones to reports on the location of mineral reserves beneath the earth, have not done so.

According to Greg Finn, P.Geo., associate professor of earth sciences and associate dean, faculty of math and science, Brock University, St. Catharines, there are two primary reasons for non-compliance with the act. First, despite years of discussion on the topic, some are simply unaware of the law. In other cases, geoscientists “know [the licensing requirement] is there, but they’re still delaying putting in their application,” he says. An APGO councillor and chair of its registration committee, he notes that similar licensing requirements either already exist in other provinces or are about to be introduced.

Bill Stiebel, P.Geo., APGO president, hopes to convince membership stragglers of the benefits of becoming licensed. “It indicates you’ve been measured, reviewed, examined by a peer group of practising professionals in the disciplines in which you operate,” he explains. A geoscientist will be recognized as “a professional, qualified by education and experience, to do professional geoscience work.” Moreover, becoming an APGO member, Stiebel says, conveys that geoscientists are committed to public safety and protection of the natural environment—a fact that impacts the engineering community. Engineers and geoscientists work closely together as one moves away from classical geology, such as exploration geology, and towards environmental areas of practice, he says. Geoscientists who are licensed by APGO indicate they are “subject to the same accountability, in terms of complaints and discipline, ethics and professional standards as professional engineers.”

APGO’s campaign, which has many levels, will rely on a “gentle stick of enforcement,” Stiebel says. So far, he has written to members updating them on the activities and issues of the association, encouraging them to talk to others about the work that geoscientists do, and urging them to sit on committees that will involve everything from communication activities to training programs. APGO also aims to send a message to user communities. “I am a firm believer that the marketplace in many respects will govern and will drive the way things evolve,” Stiebel says. As part of an outreach program, council members will remind users of geoscience services, including municipalities and private-sector firms, of the importance of working with qualified and licensed geoscientists.

Although Stiebel believes it will be a year before all of Ontario’s geoscientists are on board, he already has a plan for APGO no-shows: Rather than immediately alerting the “geoscience police” when he becomes aware of non-licensed geoscience practice, Stiebel plans to advise those in non-compliance with the act, in writing, that they should be licensed, send a more rigorous letter if they fail to respond, and finally urge the association’s registrar to inform the Attorney General’s office, which is responsible for enforcing the *Professional Geoscientists Act*.

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