# Editorial | Certifying the Practice of Structural Engineering

*By Joseph J. Luke, P.E., SECB*

The Mission Statement for the Structural Engineers Certification Board (SECB) is as follows:

- To determine the level of unique and additional education, examination, and experience necessary to perform the science and art of Structural Engineering.
- To provide a common national process for structural engineers to become certified.
- To provide the public and stakeholders with an identification instrument that distinguishes an engineer with those unique and additional qualities necessary to perform structural engineering.

The second statement implies that SECB is not intended to become the ultimate grantor of the certification, but is only to act as a vehicle toward the end of a broad based national process for certification. That certification process will require some consistency for licensing among the state Licensing Boards. The current condition of structural engineering ("SE") licensing throughout the United States is that of a patchwork of disparate processes and requirements. Even the dozen or so states with SE licensure have considerably different requirements for that licensure.

In an effort to promote public welfare and to aid stakeholders in selecting professional engineers qualified to do structural design, the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations (NCSEA) created SECB in 2003. SECB in turn created a certification process for engineers to demonstrate that they had the unique qualifications necessary to practice structural engineering. This certification process was not intended to supplant the licensing and regulatory rights of the States or other legal jurisdictions.

For engineers practicing structural engineering in states that do not have an SE license, the value of SECB certification is fairly clear. SECB certification serves as a means of differentiating structural engineering from other engineering disciplines. SECB attempts to define standards for those wishing to practice structural engineering, including education and experience requirements. Having SECB following PE on a business card brings attention to the certification of structural engineers and helps start a dialogue between structural engineers and their clients and other professionals. It gives structural engineers an opportunity to explain to others how they are distinctly qualified, by education, examination, experience and continuing education, to call themselves structural engineers.

An additional benefit of SECB certification is the much more meaningful continuing education standards compared to those required by most State Boards. The 15 PDH's required annually by SECB must all be in subjects directly related to structural engineering. Many state engineering licensing boards have very loose requirements, if any, for continuing education subjects, and the subjects do not need to be specific to the field of practice. The stricter standards are a benefit to the whole profession.

For engineers practicing structural engineering in states that have SE licensing, the value of SECB certification can be less apparent. It would be very easy for an individual to believe that there is no advantage to applying for SECB certification. The value mainly comes in thinking long term, for the individual engineer as well as the profession as a whole. The success and implementation of SE certification across the US can be expected to result in the ability of structural engineers to easily practice in other states because of consistency in licensing requirements between states.

At the NCSEA Leadership Forum held in Tucson, Arizona this past March, a Roundtable Session brought together structural engineers from all over the country, from firms of varying size and makeup, for a discussion of the current state of the practice of structural engineering and visions for the future. One interesting topic of discussion was practicing outside of the United States. Engineers that had been successful in that endeavor noted that there was utter disbelief, on the part of our overseas counterparts, at the dysfunctional state of the current practice of structural engineering in the US. A common thought was that structural engineers from the US should get their own house in order before they started moving offshore.

In November 2012, SECB signed partnering agreements with both the Structural Engineering Institute (SEI) and NCSEA. These nearly identical agreements took effect on January 1, 2013. In accordance with the agreements, SEI and NCSEA have begun actively promoting SECB certification, especially in the states where SE licensure is not yet available. In return, SECB will actively promote SE licensure nationwide. SECB will also temporarily suspend its examination requirements* and reduce its application fee for members of SEI and the Member Organizations of NCSEA.

The "Open Enrollment" period for licensed professional engineers to attain SECB certification began on January 1, 2013. An application for this open enrollment can be found at the SECB website at **www.secertboard.org**. Also on that web site one can find the history of SECB and information regarding its current activities.

SECB firmly believes that its certification of structural engineers is an interim step towards SE licensure in all states, not an alternative, nor an end, in itself. In effect, SECB's long term goal is its own disappearance.▪

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*As of January 1, 2013, the SECB examination requirement need not be met for applicants holding an active license or registration (as applicable) in any U.S. jurisdiction to act in responsible charge of structural engineering projects. The license and/or registration must have been awarded on or before July 1, 2005 and must remain valid continuously through the time of application.