

CONSULTING TIP OF THE MONTH

PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING REGISTRATION

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There is a common misconception that only engineers who “stamp drawings” need to be registered professional engineers. Actually, in most states, anyone who either offers or performs engineering services of any kind needs to be registered with the state. In Pennsylvania, the practice of engineering is regulated by [Act 367 of 1945](#). Section 3(b) defines an engineer as a person who practices engineering or in any way represents himself or herself as an engineer. The definition may vary somewhat from state to state, but this is typical.

As a chemical engineer I have never stamped a drawing, but as an engineering consultant I am required to use my stamp on any “work product” (in my case, final specifications and/or reports) for my clients.

A frequent pathway to “unlicensed practice of engineering” occurs when an engineer is outsourced. Suppose that an engineer (let’s call him Ed) is employed by a company and working under the supervision of a licensed professional engineer (Paula). Note that Ed is not required to be licensed because he is working under the “responsible charge” of Paula. One fateful day, management decides that Ed’s job should be outsourced ... and the company hires Ed to continue the work. Ed is now working as an independent engineering consultant (a 1099 contractor, not a W-2 employee) and he is required to be licensed. This is true even though Ed is working at the same desk ... doing the exact same job ... and still reporting to Paula. While Paula may be in responsible charge of the company’s engineering project, Ed is now in responsible charge of his consulting work product which is being sold to his former company.

While getting licensed is not a particularly easy process, it is absolutely necessary for an engineering consultant. Engineering registration is regulated at the state level; you can find out more about getting licensed at www.ncees.com, which has links for each state.

Dr. Staffeld is President of the Pennsylvania Society of Professional Engineers – Lehigh Valley Chapter, and has written and lectured on the subject of professional engineering registration. He is currently an engineering consultant at Staffeld Engineering Services, and an Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering at Villanova University. Prior to becoming a consultant he was Vice President of Manufacturing for a plastics company, and held various positions at Mobil Oil Corporation. He can be contacted at peter@staffeld.com or president@lvpspe.org.

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