



Engineers New Zealand

ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADDRESS CONCERNS RAISED BY THE SCARRY OPEN LETTER

The Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand (IPENZ) has acted openly, and responsibly to address concerns raised by the open letter to it by John Scarry. Scarry contends that both inadequate building designs are being performed, and that methods of construction are sometimes so poor that real building performance will fall short of design. The effect is that there may be buildings that will start to structurally fail in a lower magnitude seismic event than prescribed in the standards that were in place at the times that buildings were designed and built.

Upon receipt of the letter IPENZ responded by forming a practice review group of experts to review the allegations, seek and hear submissions, and then formulate recommendations that can be implemented by IPENZ or others. This group has met several times, and is progressing according to the timetable set.

We are doing this review even though our jurisdiction in fact is quite limited said Dr Andrew Cleland, Chief Executive of IPENZ. The approval of designs and certification of buildings is performed by regulators such as Territorial Local Authorities. At the time we received the Scarry letter we were a voluntary professional body who could only act in two ways. We could try to persuade those involved with building regulation to adopt better processes and standards, or we could respond to an allegation that a named member had breached our Code of Ethics. In the last several years we have received no such complaint in respect to the type of matters that the open letter raised.

Our reasons for acting immediately are that we see ourselves as having a leadership role in identifying and promoting good practice amongst the engineering profession, and because there was a major public good involved.

With the enactment of the Chartered Professional Engineers of New Zealand Act 2002 and changes we made to our Institution Rules in December 2002 we will be able to do more. The Rule changes allow us to investigate complaints against Members brought on competence as well as ethical grounds. The Act establishes us as the Registration Authority to decide who to register as a Chartered Professional Engineer (CPEng). We will be carefully assessing the competence of every structural engineer who applies. They will be required to produce comprehensive documentation demonstrating their competence, and including referees statements from competent practitioners. They may also be required to produce work samples. The practice review presently underway may suggest refinement of the competence assessment process, and we would act on any such recommendations said Dr Cleland.

The problems we still face in trying to look after the interests of the wider public are that until regulators in the building industry require that only registered persons are allowed to perform vital structural engineering work, or we receive specific complaints naming people the CPEng registration system will not materially assist. The system will not cover those poor practitioners who choose not to apply, and try to pass sub-standard work through territorial authorities.

The announcement by Government in its Building Act discussion paper released on 12 March that it favours a mandatory regulation regime is encouraging. That will add a vital link in the chain that will

ensure that any problems of the type alleged by Mr Scarry can be prevented in the future. Mandatory registration would prevent access to work by those that cannot prove their competence, and debar those against whom serious complaints are upheld.

Leaving aside our actions as Registration Authority for CPEng which commence this year, if there are specific buildings out there that on inspection are found to be faulty, and this can be proven to be due to shortcomings of an IPENZ Member we would investigate and discipline the Member concerned.

Contacts

Dr Andrew Cleland
Chief Executive
IPENZ ENGINEERS NEW ZEALAND
Ph (04) 474 8935
Mob: 025 274 3555

John Gardiner
Deputy Chief Executive
IPENZ ENGINEERS NEW ZEALAND
Ph (04) 474 8932
Mob: 027 439 5130