NSPE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

NSPE Ethics Study Guide

Introduction

What is ethics?
Professional Ethics is a set of standards defined by the professional community which provides a guide for behavior that is expected from the professional.

Why study ethics?
The purpose of study is to familiarize oneself to the professional standards that apply to your profession. These standards vary from state to state, organizations, country and culture. Registration laws incorporate ethics with varying detail, so that what is stated in one jurisdiction may not be stated in another. Knowing the differences will help you grow professionally.

Why practice ethics?
Violating the professional standards of behavior can have financial and legal consequences.
List the consequences of unethical behavior.

NSPE Board of Ethical Review (BER)
The first engineering ethics standards were drafted at the end of the 19th century by a few newly created technical societies. NSPE created standards of conduct early in its history which developed to a "Canon of Ethics for Engineers and Professional Conduct" by 1946. The BER was created in 1954 consisting of a panel of professional engineers that serve as the profession's guide through ethical dilemmas. The Canon of Ethics developed over time to become the current Code of Ethics which was adopted in 1964. The code has been refined into the current version over the past 50 + years. The board consists of seven licensed members who are appointed by the NSPE president with the purpose of rendering impartial opinions pertaining to the interpretation of the NSPE Code of Ethics. The BER also develops materials, and conduct studies relating to ethics of the engineering profession.

NSPE Ethics Test

Attendees take the ethics test as a pre-test
https://www.nspe.org/resources/ethics/ethics-resources/code-ethics-examination

Steps to Ethical Engineering Decisions

Nine steps to ethical engineering decisions

1. Stop and Think
    a. Stop with the hustle and bustle and quietly reflect on the situation.
    b. Stop and review relative information about the situation
    c. Stop and take a step back to look at the big picture.
    d. Think if the situation will result in losing employment, a client or worse.
    e. Think if there are similar situations other engineers have encountered.
    f. Understand why this situation has presented itself to you.
    g. Who benefits and who gets penalized from the situation?

2. Clarify goals
    a. Clarify if this is an ethical or legal situation or both.
    b. What is the most desired outcome:
        i. Obtaining a contract
        ii. Looking good for self-promotion
        iii. Increase income
        iv. Prestige
        v. Peace and quiet
3. Determine facts known and unknown
    a. From reviewing the relative information on the situation are there missing facts that can be researched?
    b. Are there reliable resources that can be consulted
    c. Are there legal resources that would shed light on the situation
    d. Are there ethical resources that can be researched
4. Develop options
    a. Identify the alternate approaches
    b. Outline the options
5. Consider foreseeable results of options
    a. From the tabulated options are there risks that can be applied to each
    b. Are there benefits
    c. Consider a simple scoring system to help highlight the best option
    d. Are you being honest with yourself
6. Refer to the NSPE Ethics Resources
    a. NSPE Code of Ethics
    b. NSPE Board of Ethical Review Cases (over 500 situations)
7. Refer to state registration law for guidance
    a. Review the specific registration law of your home state.
    b. Review the specific registration law of the state where the project is located.
8. Consult with respected staff or outside professionals
    a. Discuss the situation with trusted professionals
    b. Discuss the situation with the legal council of the state boards
    c. Discuss the situation with a close friend or relative
    d. Discuss the situation with a Professional Society executive of NSPE or State or Chapter Society.
9. Decide the course of action and take it
    a. After going through the eight steps above, a clear picture of what is expected from a professional in the situation will become clear. In the most professional way act on the decision.
    b. Professionally and respectfully decline the assignment.
    c. Refer the work to another professional who will not be placed in the same situation.
    d. Inform the authorities if necessary

NSPE Code of Ethics

The code of ethics is reviewed with attendees

Key Concepts in Engineering Ethics

Work with the code of ethics to highlight the areas
Hierarchy of Ethical Obligations: Primary-Public, Secondary-Employer/Client, Tertiary-Other Stakeholder

Ethics Cases

BER Cases on a common topic-Pick your own cases to discuss that can be found in the Ethics Reference Guide: https://www.nspe.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/Ethics/EthicsReferenceGuide.pdf

As an example present cases from the following BER subject matter:

Academic Ethics: Cases 12-1,79-5,05-12
Advertising Ethics:
Competitive Bidding:
Conflict of Interest:
Etc., Etc., Etc.

NSPE Ethics Test

Attendees take the ethics test as a post-test, compare test scores.

https://www.nspe.org/resources/ethics/ethics-resources/code-ethics-examination

Did your score improve?