May 9, 2017

Kimberly A. Holden
Deputy Associate Director, Recruitment and Hiring
US Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415-1000

Dear Ms. Holden,

On behalf of the more than 31,000 members of the National Society of Professional Engineers, I would like to provide comments on the individual occupational requirements for all “Professional Engineering Positions, 0800.” Licensed engineers play a critically important role in designing innovative solutions to societal challenges and in protecting the public health, safety, and welfare. As the federal government strives to promote increased economic opportunity while ensuring public safety, all federal agencies must establish and maintain high engineering qualifications and standards for employees in the federal workforce.

The individual occupational requirements for all professional engineering positions, 0800, sets forth basic requirements for educational standards, additional experience and training provisions for graduates of engineering programs, types of creditable work experience, and requirements for engineering licensure within the federal workforce. The term “professional engineer” is a recognized, protected, and defined term under state statutes and regulations in all US states and territories. The licensing process for professional engineers began in 1907 and is regulated by state and territory licensing boards.

The Office of Personnel Management’s use of the term “professional engineering” to define positions that are not professional engineering positions creates substantial confusion about job scope and responsibilities. NSPE, therefore, urges OPM to discontinue the use of the term “Professional Engineering Positions” and to retitle the classification as “Engineering Positions.”

To attain licensure as a professional engineer, an individual must earn a bachelor’s degree in engineering from a program accredited by ABET’s Engineering Accreditation Commission or one assessed by the EAC as substantially comparable. OPM includes this requirement for its “Professional Engineering Positions”; but it also offers alternatives that would not otherwise qualify for engineering licensure in any US state or territory. If OPM is unwilling to revise its requirements for anyone fulfilling a “Professional Engineering Position,” NSPE requests that OPM revise its standards to ensure that the educational requirements for these positions align with existing educational standards outside of the federal government.
The OPM individual occupational requirement states, “Many engineering positions demand specific competence in a particular function or area. For such positions, agencies may use selective factors to identify those applicants whose records show evidence of the required capabilities.” NSPE believes that the professional engineering license, which demonstrates an individual’s education; experience; and foremost responsibility to the public health, safety, and welfare; is the highest standard for engineering practice. Licensure as a professional engineer must be the only legal designation required for the practice of engineering. Continued recognition of professional engineering licensure as the defining qualification for professional practice is crucial to the public’s understanding of the profession and trust in it. Professional engineers are already ethically bound to practice within their area of expertise. Therefore, professional engineers should not be restricted in their practice by additional selective factors.

OPM’s standards do specifically address licensure as a professional engineer, stating, “Registration or licensure as a professional engineer is an appropriate selective factor for appointment to certain, typically high-level, engineering positions. The key consideration is that registration or licensure must be essential for acceptable performance of the work of the positions to be filled.” OPM further defines specific instances where a PE would be required.

NSPE advocates that federal employees who are in responsible charge of engineering activities should be required by federal agency policy to be licensed professional engineers in at least one jurisdiction. NSPE urges OPM to revise the engineering licensure standard to require compliance with state licensure laws.

NSPE and OPM share a common mission to ensure that the engineer’s foremost priority is to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. A professional engineer’s rigorous training and demonstrated expertise is a prerequisite to meeting this goal.

NSPE and the professional engineers it represents have a foremost responsibility to protect the public health, safety, and welfare—and to make others aware of ways that safety may be jeopardized. If we can answer any questions or comments, please contact Arielle Eiser, senior manager of government relations, at aeiser@nspe.org.

Sincerely,

Kodi Jean Verhalen, P.E., Esq., F.NSPE
President, 2016–2017