

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Professional engineers provide the needed link between industry and public welfare

Two months after oil began leaking into the Gulf of Mexico, it is now clear to the American public that their health, safety, and welfare can fall victim to bottom-line driven business decisions. This is particularly true when corporations such as BP, while operating in a climate of lax enforcement, fail to pursue properly qualified technical expertise.

In response to the unresolved Deepwater Horizon blowout, the Department of the Interior is in the process of implementing several new regulations on activities on the Outer Continental Shelf. One of the measures outlined in NTL No. 2010-N05, "National Notice to Lessees and Operators of Federal Oil and Gas Leases, Outer Continental Shelf," specifies that a professional engineer (PE) must certify all well casing designs and cementing procedures and verify that designs are appropriate for expected wellbore conditions. This is a much-needed requirement, and we should all hope that the proper steps are taken to ensure that it is enacted. We should also hope that similarly qualified professionals are called on more often to make informed judgments during the enforcement stage.

PEs, many of whom are employed in the private sector, demonstrate that business activities need not sacrifice the interests of the public. Professional engineers are licensed at the state level; they must meet education and experience requirements in addition to passing a standardized examination program. To maintain the license, a PE must adhere to a strict code of conduct, with the primary charge being to practice the profession in a manner that protects the health, safety and welfare of the public. A PE who violates this obligation is subject to losing his or her license.

Under model rules developed by the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) and required by many states, a PE is obligated to notify authorities if his or her professional judgment is overruled under circumstances where the life, health, property, or welfare of the public is endangered. Unfortunately, cost considerations can prevent corporations from requesting the services of a PE unless they are compelled to do so.

It should be obvious by now that the millions of Americans who will be affected by the oil spill could have benefited from requiring the parties responsible to secure a professional engineer's sealed approval. While we can't go back and prevent what has already happened, we can work to ensure that the proper steps are taken to prevent similar disasters. Oil drilling is only one of many areas where professional engineers can be called on to ensure that business activities do not ignore the public welfare.

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ABOUT NCEES

NCEES is a national nonprofit organization composed of engineering and surveying licensing boards representing the United States and its territories. An accredited standards developer with the American National Standards Institute, NCEES develops, scores, and administers the examinations used for engineering and surveying licensure throughout the United States. NCEES also provides services facilitating professional mobility for licensed engineers and surveyors. Its headquarters is located in Clemson, S.C.

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