

"Organization and Activities of the Denver Federal Center
Professional Engineers Group"

by
Danny L. King, P.E.
President

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WHEN BORROWED RETURN PROMPTLY

A discussion presented at the Southwestern Regional Meeting of NSPE,
November 2-4, 1967, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

History

The State Functional Section for Engineers in Government was authorized by the Professional Engineers of Colorado in April 1960. At that time, membership in the Functional Section consisted of engineers from several levels of government. However, the primary interest appeared to come from federal government engineers and meetings were held regularly at the Federal Center. In May 1962, with the advice of NSPE national headquarters, the Denver Federal Center Professional Engineers Group was organized. At about the same time, the Group learned of Executive Order 10988 which was issued in January 1962.

The American Federation of Technical Engineers (AFL-CIO) had been active within the Chief Engineer's Office of the Bureau of Reclamation for several years. This union was instrumental in gaining approval for the new Reclamation Office Building and, as a result, the union had gained in popularity. Because of this popularity, they began to solicit representation agreements from individual engineers in an apparent attempt to gain exclusive recognition.

The Professional Engineers Group obtained informal recognition under Executive Order 10988 in September 1962. Both the union and the Professional Engineers Group gained formal recognition in August 1963, which required membership of at least 10 percent in the unit under consideration. The unit, in this case, was about 700 engineers in the Civil Service GS-800 Series.

Membership

Membership in the Professional Engineers Group is limited to PE's and EIT's employed at the Denver Federal Center. The primary membership is within the Office of Chief Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation, as a result of the origin of the Group and the relatively greater number of engineers in that office. Membership according to agencies is as follows:

Forest Service	1
Bureau of Land Management	1
Federal Water Pollution Control Administration	1
Geological Survey	2
General Services Administration	10
Region 7, Bureau of Reclamation	9
Office of Chief Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation	175
Total	199

Several new members are added each month.

Recognition under EO 10988 is held only in the Office of Chief Engineer at this time. It has been Group policy that recognition in any agency should be initiated by engineers within that agency.

Relationship with NSPE and PEC

The Professional Engineers Group is sponsored by the Colorado Functional Section for Engineers in Government. Either party has the right to unilaterally withdraw from this sponsorship.

Less than half of the Group members are also members of NSPE and PEC. However, four of the five Executive Committee members are members of NSPE and PEC. One member of the Executive Committee acts as liaison with the Functional Section. This year, the liaison member happens also to be State Chairman of the Functional Section, which provides an unusual opportunity for communication.

Objectives

The objectives of the Professional Engineers Group are described in Article III of the Constitution:

"To promote the highest standards of professional engineering practices within the various agencies of the Federal Government located at the Denver Federal Center.

"To improve the status and recognition of professional engineers in the Federal service by encouraging the development, through professional level contacts with Agency officials, of policies to improve utilization, employment practices, working conditions, and professional development.

"To stimulate interest and participation in professional society activities, thereby strengthening professional unity through increased membership."

I will attempt to describe how these objectives are being realized through the various activities of the Professional Engineers Group.

General Activities

The Professional Engineers Group meets monthly to conduct business and for informative programs. The programs have been widely varied to include discussions and films concerned with professionalism, a layman's view of engineers, and discussions on technical subjects such as value engineering, weather modification, and aesthetic design of power substations.

An annual meeting and banquet are held each May to summarize the past year's activities, present our Engineer of the Year Award, and hear programs by

distinguished agency officials or local speakers. Wives also attend this activity and there has been a marked interest during the past years as evidenced by the large attendance.

Committee Activities

The activities of the several committees have been responsible for the success which the Professional Engineers Group has enjoyed.

The Membership Committee is responsible, of course, for membership drives and personal contacts to encourage eligible PE's and EIT's to join the Professional Engineers Group. The Committee is also responsible for updating and issuing the membership roster. This year, the Committee has been directed to encourage membership in NSPE.

The Legislative Committee reviews pending state and national legislation and keeps the Professional Engineers Group informed on important issues. Contacts with legislators and congressmen are maintained. We are attempting to direct some of the emphasis from pay legislation to matters such as air and water pollution, community affairs, etc.

The Professional Recognition Committee is enhancing the stature of federally-employed Professional Engineers through several active programs. Frames have been provided free-of-charge for display of registration certificates. A recent program provided desk nameplates to 230 Professional Engineers. Each nameplate included the initials "P.E." The Committee also initiated a program to make business cards available to all employees. Five Engineer of the Year awards have been made with resulting widespread publicity for the Professional Engineers in federal service. Future programs to gain further recognition are being planned.

The Office of Chief Engineer has for several years prominently displayed the names of Registered Professional Engineers and Certified Engineers-in-Training in the reception lobby.

The Professional Development Committee is responsible for encouragement and guidance for registration. At the present time there are 498 Registered Professional Engineers and 67 Certified Engineers-in-Training in the Office of Chief Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation. This totals 565 out of about 700 eligibles (about 80 percent). Every EIT will soon be contacted to remind him to become registered as soon as he is eligible. The Committee also reviews training programs and continuing education programs. It assisted in formulation of an interchange program for Bureau of Reclamation GS-11's and 12's which provides for "job-swapping" for periods up to 6 months among engineers in various offices. The Professional Engineers Group is also interested in professional development of engineers in other countries. Last year, we sponsored a campaign which collected several tons of surplus technical literature for Asian students. This program will be repeated annually.

The Working Conditions Committee keeps us informed on current new construction and remodeling activity at the Denver Federal Center. The Committee can also bring attention to needed improvements in working conditions. This function may resemble union interests; however, suggestions made to management do not carry the atmosphere of collective bargaining.

The Employment Practices Committee reviews personnel policies, usually at the request of management. The Professional Engineers Group has also independently sponsored surveys and questionnaires to determine problem areas. The results are submitted to management.

General Comments

All contacts with management are made in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation. The Professional Engineers Group feels that bargaining or intimidation are not justifiable.

Union activity within the Office of Chief Engineer has become a definite threat. Our reaction against this activity has undoubtedly caused hard feelings, and this is very unfortunate. However, the Professional Engineers Group feels that Professional Engineers must have the right to remain separated from collective bargaining activities. The following policy statement was recently distributed to all PE's and EIT's at the Federal Center:

"The Denver Federal Center Professional Engineers Group obtained formal recognition with the Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Chief Engineer, under the terms of Executive Order 10988 in August 1963; the purpose being to ensure that this organization would be consulted on the formulation and implementation of personnel policies and practices, working conditions, etc. This arrangement, which has proved beneficial both to this organization and to management, is valid only if no other organization holds exclusive recognition as the representative of employees in the same unit.

"This organization does not intend to seek exclusive recognition as the representative of professional employees in the Bureau of Reclamation or any other agency at the Federal Center. We believe that the collective bargaining nature of exclusive recognition makes it incompatible with professional standards which are so important to the development of the engineer as an individual and to the profession as a whole.

"We feel that every professional engineer is obligated to investigate and thoroughly evaluate attempts of any organization to represent him with management."

The Professional Engineers Group will continue to issue statements and provide information so that our position will be clear. Union aims recently became even more apparent when the American Federation of Technical Engineers (AFL-CIO) gained exclusive representation of all nonsupervisory, nonprofessional

technical employees (which includes engineering technicians) within the Office of Chief Engineer. This group included many technicians who have been certified by the Institute for the Certification of Engineering Technicians.

Why do unions have any popularity at all? Management is partially to blame. Highly-trained engineers have been allowed to stagnate with many years of menial assignments. Attitudes of supervisors toward young engineers have stifled professional development. The "time-clock principle" of working hours is not conducive to a professional atmosphere. In the previous Reclamation Office building, bells were rung at the beginning and end of each working day. Hopefully, this practice will not be initiated in the new headquarters. Time-charging practices at the beginning and end of each fiscal year border on the unethical. Unfortunately, this is often beyond the control of management, at least local management. The practice of "ghost-writing" of official correspondence and technical papers for superiors is disheartening. Also, hundreds of unsigned or anonymous reports are issued every year, and all reports and papers continue to be written in the passive voice. There are limitations on outside work. I do not disagree with the principle, but there seems to be a wide variation in the degree of restriction among the various agencies. A former president of the Professional Engineers Group jokingly concluded that a Reclamation engineer could take an outside job as a shoe salesman--if he agreed not to sell engineer boots!

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Professional engineers in the Federal service are always hindered by "red tape." And, of course, there is the eternal comparability gap in pay.

Another morale problem is caused by individuals with personal "axes-to-grind" who condemn all engineers in an agency.

Some confusion results from differing interests among the various agencies which we represent and from the fact that some management officials and many supervisors are members of the Professional Engineers Group. EO 10988 includes rules against possible conflicts of interest. However, the concept of management is not well defined as to which levels of supervision are included and which are not.

How about the other side of the coin? Engineers are somewhat responsible for their problems. I often hear criticism of our representation as a Professional Engineers Group, from individuals with an apathy toward personal involvement. Many engineers have an unprofessional attitude toward overtime, insisting that an 8-hour day is the absolute maximum, regardless of the circumstances. This is the other side of the "time-clock principle." Also, some engineers abuse sick leave privileges, which is certainly unethical conduct. There is habitual tardiness, and conducting of personal business during working hours which would, even under less restrictive conditions, be considered improper. Some engineers fail to present a professional appearance and many project a poor image through poor writing and incorrect grammar in speech.

These problems, whether the fault of management or of the engineers, can be solved only through cooperation and sincere attempts to recognize the other point of view. Hopefully, the Denver Federal Center Professional Engineers Group is making progress.