AEG Sacramento Section and GRA of California

Joint Holiday Meeting Announcement
Wednesday, December 12, 2012

Location: Aviator’s Restaurant, Sacramento Executive Airport
6151 Freeport Blvd., Sacramento, CA
Lots of free parking!
Link to map: Aviator's Restaurant-Catering

Speaker: Dr. John W. Williams, Professor Emeritus CSU San Jose

Topic: Professional Ethics - An Essential Element of the Geoscience Profession

Agenda:
5:30–6:30pm – Social hour (and buy Raffle tickets)
6:30–7:30pm – Dinner and Announcements
7:30–8:15pm – Speaker Presentation – Dr. John W. Williams
8:15–8:30pm – Questions and Response
8:30–8:45pm – Raffle – proceeds benefit the student scholarship funds of both GRA and AEG

Don’t forget to purchase your raffle tickets at the door!!!
Tickets are $1 each or 6 for $5
Please, we encourage folks to bring in donations for the raffle prizes!

Meeting Cost: $30 members (with RSVP) and $35 non-members
There will be a $3 surcharge for no RSVP
$10 students (no surcharge for student walk-ins) The FIRST 5 students to RSVP are free.

You may RSVP by going to -- http://www.aegsacto.org or by sending an email to: Tim.McCrink@conservation.ca.gov
Professional Ethics – An Essential Element of the Geoscience Profession

JOHN A. WILLIAMS, PHD
Professor Emeritus California State University, San Jose

ABSTRACT

Topics related to ethics appear daily in the world’s media. Ethics committee hearings are held frequently at local, state and national levels. Even with all of this spotlighting of ethics, many members of the public doubt that positive changes are taking place. In contrast to personal ethics, professional ethics are described as the use of specialized knowledge and skills by a profession to provide services to the public. This moral activity is governed by a set of standards--codes of ethics, adopted by the professional community. The medical, legal, and engineering professions have had formal standards for many years with the formalization of medical ethics dating from the Hippocratic Oath; legal ethics were reinvigorated by the events of the 1972 Watergate break-in, and the 1986 Challenger disaster caused changes in the engineering community. More recently the growth of state geological licensing has influenced the creation of formal geoscience codes of ethics.

Some geoscientists point to the delayed start in the implementation of formal codes of ethics as a major reason professional ethics are not more integrated components of the geoscience profession. This argument is subject to challenge when one considers that other major concepts such as plate tectonics have become well established underpinnings of the profession within the same time period.

To evaluate this situation of the implementation of formal geoscience codes of ethics, many factors should be considered including:

- The commonly held belief that ethics are established early in life by family experiences, religious teachings, peer interaction, etc. and, therefore, the value of formal codes is very limited. The assumption is made that upon entering a profession an individual already has a pattern of knowing and doing right or wrong.
- There is confusion over the important differences between personal and professional ethics.
- Currently there is limited formal education in professional ethics in the geoscience classes of colleges and universities. The required ethics instructional programs in the medical, legal, and engineering fields are a contrast to the lack of them in the geosciences.
- The public perception is that professional ethics are not really enforced in many professions and thus by default are meaningless.
• To date only a portion of one generation of geoscience practitioners has been exposed to formal codes of ethics with the result of having had limited opportunity to develop an appreciation of professional ethics.
• Until recently there is limited scientific evidence that members of the profession place significant emphasis on the importance of professional ethics.

Against this challenging backdrop, there are some positive signs of improvement such as:

• An increase in the number of formal codes of ethics associated with state licensing
• The allocation of personnel and other resources at the state level for ethics enforcement
• The expanded availability of public information about state government involvement in ethics enforcement
• The increase in professional ethics instruction in academic settings
• The inclusion of professional ethics questions on national licensing examinations
• Professional ethics workshops and presentations at professional society meetings
• Increasing recognition that geoscientists are more involved in increasingly complex technical and ethical situations with greater consequences for poor quality work.

One can be optimistic that increased emphasis in geoscience professional ethics will lead to a greater confidence by the public in the quality of our work.

Speaker Bio:  Dr. John W. Williams

Dr. Williams is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Geology at San José State University where for 36 years he was professor of engineering geology and for 25 years served as department chair. He earned a BS in geology at the College of William and Mary and an MS and PhD at Stanford University. Prior to joining San José State, he was a geologist with the California Division of Mines and Geology (now the California Geological Survey). He is a California licensed PG, CEG, and CHG. He is past president of the Association of Environmental and Engineering Geologists (AEG), past president and founding member of the AEG Foundation, past president of the Association of State Boards of Geology (ASBOG®), and past president and founding member of the ASBOG® Foundation. He chairs the Ethics Committee for ASBOG®. He has written extensively on a wide range of geoscience topics including slope stability, hazard zoning, land-use planning, education, and professional ethics.
We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our corporate co-sponsors for this meeting, Gregg Drilling and California Laboratory Services. Please take a moment during the meeting to introduce yourself and get to know both of these companies who have outstanding records of performance in both the geotechnical and environmental industries.

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