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Innovation in Establishing the Standard of Care in a Self-Regulated Profession

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The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC) is a self-regulatory body that governs the practice of professional geoscience and engineering in British Columbia, Canada. Currently, there are more than 1600 Professional Geoscientists and 300 Geoscientists-in-Training registered with APEGBC. In BC, Professional Geoscientists practice in areas such as; mining, mineral exploration, oil and gas exploration, geophysics, environmental geology and hydrogeology.

Under Law, Professional Geoscientists have a duty of care that they must adhere to when they carry out a professional activity [1]. The question is, when a duty of care exists, what is the standard of care that is owed?

Professional regulatory bodies can play an important role in establishing the standard of care that is required for professional activities. APEGBC has been an innovative leader in the development of guidance and tools that establish the standard of care that a Professional Geoscientist must meet in their professional duties. APEGBC utilizes the expertise of its geoscience members in developing this guidance.

APEGBC recognizes that there are two fundamental levels of influence on the standard of care; individual and organizational. At the individual level, APEGBC has established six Quality Management Guidelines that apply to all Geoscientists regulated by APEGBC regardless of their field of practice or the sector they work in. In addition, APEGBC actively develops Professional Practice Guidelines that identify the level of effort, standard of care and due diligence its Professional Geoscientists should provide to fulfil their professional obligations when carrying out specific activities. While not technical standards the APEGBC Professional Practice Guidelines provide direction so a professional activity can be carried out within a framework of good professional practice.

APEGBC has developed more than 35 Professional Practice Guidelines for Professional Geoscientists and Engineers, guidelines specific to geoscience include; *Dam Site Foundation Assessment Guidelines*, *Terrain Stability Assessments in the Forest Sector*, *Legislated Landslide Assessments*, *Legislated Flood Assessments in a Changing Climate in BC* and the Association continues to develop more.

At the organizational level, APEGBC launched the voluntary Organizational Quality Management Program (OQM) in 2012 in recognition of the significant influence that Geoscience and Engineering organizations have on the practice of professional geoscience and engineering in BC. The OQM program is the first of its kind in Canada and provides guidance on how to confirm, adapt, adopt or create policies and procedures within an overall corporate quality management system which are consistent with the requirements that their APEGBC Professional employees must meet.

Through the development of the OQM Program, Quality Management Guidelines and Professional Practice guidelines, APEGBC is taking an active role in developing innovative tools which establish the standard of care that Professional Geoscientists and their organizations should follow.

References:

[1] Andrews G.C. (2014) Canadian Professional Engineering and Geoscience, 129-130

