



Give your opinion, yes, but never take it lightly!

As a professional, you will be asked to give your opinion throughout your career. Your clients, employers, fellow engineers or colleagues will ask you for your opinion, which will probably play a decisive role in a decision-making process.

Regardless of who asks for your professional opinion and what the circumstances are, the same expectations always apply to you as a professional: rigour, competence, knowledge, honesty, independence and integrity.

In that respect, the Code of Ethics of Engineers stipulates that:

2.04. The engineer shall express his opinion on matters dealing with engineering only if such opinion is based on sufficient knowledge and honest convictions.

BUT WHAT DOES “OPINION” MEAN?

The word “opinion” must be understood in the broader sense of the term. For instance, an opinion may be given in writing or verbally. It may be an opinion, a report, an expert assessment, a certificate of compliance and even advice. Signing or sealing a plan or a specification is also expressing an opinion in the meaning of the Code of Ethics.

Furthermore, an opinion is deemed to be “dealing with engineering” as soon as it reasonably falls within a recognized field of practice in engineering. For that reason, there is no need to demonstrate that it is an act reserved for engineers.

For example, engineers who sign a pre-purchase building inspection report – an act that is not reserved – must do so with the same rigour as if they signed an expert assessment of the structure of a bridge.

SEVERAL ASPECTS NEED TO BE ANALYZED

Engineers are responsible for determining whether they have “sufficient knowledge.” To do so, they must assess whether they have enough of the experience and training they need to share their opinion and do the work they have been asked to do. If they conclude that they have the required qualifications, they must then make sure that they have acquired the specific factual knowledge required for the project, such as measurements, test or laboratory results, drawings, observations, site visits, etc.

Furthermore, engineers must express their opinion only if it is based on “honest convictions.” This concept is



even harder to define but can be understood to mean the intellectual honesty, objectivity, independence and integrity that engineers must always demonstrate whenever they issue an opinion dealing with engineering.

WHEN SHOULD YOU FOLLOW THESE RULES?

Take careful note that these rules always apply in an identical manner regardless of the amount of compensation – even when you do volunteer work – or the scope and complexity of the work.

Therefore, before expressing an opinion dealing with engineering, engineers must be sure that their opinion is based on sufficient knowledge and honest convictions.

When these conditions cannot be met, professionals must refrain from sharing their opinion. This rule must be rigorously followed to maintain not only the bond of trust between the engineering profession and the public, but also harmonious, respectful relations between members of the profession. ◀