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FLORIDA BOARD OF
PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

Connection

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July 2023

From the Executive Director: Celebrating 25 Years of FEMC

By **Zana Raybon**, FBPE Executive Director & FEMC President

The Florida Engineers Management Corporation is celebrating 25 years this month. On July 1, 1998, FEMC took over as the administrative staff for the Florida Board of Professional Engineers.



The Legislature [passed the bill](#) creating the Florida Engineers Management Corporation during its 1997 session. Gov. Lawton Chiles allowed the bill to become law without his signature. The law privatized administrative functions that were previously handled by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. It took a year before FEMC was ready to assume its role.

According to a 1998 article in *Engineering News-Record*, the genesis of FEMC's creation goes back even farther. Following Hurricane Andrew in 1992, DBPR received around 4,500 complaints related to contracting that, a department spokesman said, "brought us almost to gridlock."

The article continues: "That didn't go over well with engineers or the public."

Calls to the Board were going unanswered, complaints against Professional Engineers went uninvestigated, cases determined to have merit by a Probable Cause Panel were dropped without explanation by DBPR attorneys, and the Board was being assessed "huge 'administrative charges' by the department for these services," explained Paul A. Ledford, executive director of the Florida Engineering Society, in an October 1999 column for *Florida Engineering Journal* magazine.

Another article in that issue of *Florida Engineering Journal* says that in its first year, FEMC handled over 25,000 PE license renewals and 4,000 new applications.

A [legislative review of FEMC's first year](#) found that it processed over two-and-a-half times as many complaints than before its creation (227 vs. 82), with over four times as many complaints being processed in a timely fashion (40 vs. 9).

Today, FEMC continues providing exceptional support for Florida's Professional Engineers and public.

FEMC processed over 37,000 PE license renewals during the 2022-23 period. In Fiscal Year 2021-22, FEMC handled 3,800 new licensure applications and 213 complaints, of which 137 were found legally sufficient for investigation.

FEMC has accomplished all of this with the same annual budget it started with 25 years ago, despite inflation and other economic factors.

It's 12 employees focus strictly on the engineering profession and can respond quickly to inquiries from PEs and the public. Whereas, when the Board was still incorporated into DBPR's structure, its staff served multiple professions.

"Private organizations can constructively 'tailor' their services to a specific profession in ways that may not be practical for DBPR," the 1999 legislative review said. "It can be concluded that services provided by a private body, dedicated solely to serving a single profession, can deliver services better, in the sense that the services can be tailored to the needs and priorities of that single profession."

The *ENR* article ends: "There's one other sign of progress. When callers dial the engineering board now, they no longer hear a recording. 'Now you get a live person on the phone,' says Ledford."

That's still the case today. Not only do we answer calls, but emails as well.

Here's to another 25 years.

Chair's Corner: Changes to the FRSE Program

By **Dylan Albergo**, PE, FBPE Chair (2023)

This article serves as an update to my April 2023 article titled "[Chair's Corner: Clarifying the Structural Engineering Recognition Program.](#)"

Section 471.055, Florida Statutes, required the Board to establish the Structural Engineering Recognition Program as a method for Professional Engineers licensed in Florida who specialize in structural engineering to request recognition for having "gone above and beyond the required minimum Professional Engineer licensing standards."

As of June 29, 2023, Rule 61G15-20.0011, Florida Administrative Code, has been amended to be more inclusive of professional engineers who clearly demonstrate structural engineering expertise. The most significant update is an amendment of the required post-licensure years of experience from 15 to 5 years.

Additionally, some Special Inspectors (SI) of Threshold Buildings are now able to qualify. To be included, the SI must meet all requirements of the rule, and have been certified as a Special Inspector of Threshold Buildings pursuant to section 471.015(7), F.S., prior to February 2016, or if certified after February 2016, sought certification based on principal practice in the area of structural engineering as defined in Rule 61G15-35.003(1)(a) and (b), F.A.C.

Certification as a Special Inspector (Limited) will not qualify an applicant for recognition.

Those wishing to qualify must demonstrate that they meet or exceed the rule requirements by completing the [form on the Board website](#). Applicants should be descriptive enough to demonstrate a total of at least five years of post-licensure structural engineering experience working on significant structural engineering projects.

These amendments will help to ensure that those deserving of the recognition will be able to qualify.

As a reminder, the recognition does not entitle a Florida Professional Engineer to do anything beyond what any PE can do. It is strictly a voluntary and optional program.



PEs who receive the recognition may use FRSE — for Florida Recognized Structural Engineer — to market and advertise their professional practice.

The Board does not require PEs practicing structural engineering to have the FRSE recognition. Any PE may offer structural engineering services in areas which they are competent.

Initial Licensure Fees Cut by Half During Next Two Years

As of July 1, 2023, those applying for a Florida Professional Engineer license will save 50 percent on their initial licensure fees.

House Bill 1091, which was approved by the Legislature and signed into law by the governor, also reduces by half the PE renewal fee for the 2024-25 renewal period and the temporary PE licensure fee.

The reduction cuts the \$100 initial PE license fee to \$50 but does not apply to the \$125 application fee or the \$5 unlicensed activity fee. The total amount collected will be \$180, rather than \$230.

For a temporary PE license, the law changes the licensure fee from \$25 to \$12.50. Again, the application and unlicensed activity fees remain unchanged. The total for a temporary license will be \$142.50.

The fee reductions will continue through June 30, 2025.

The new law does not apply to other fees, such as Engineer Intern or Special Inspector certifications, or those involving status changes, reinstatements, other certifications, or duplicate certificates.



Signing and Sealing Tips and Tricks

A source of ongoing confusion for Professional Engineers relates to [signing, dating, and sealing final engineering documents](#) when a physical seal is not used.

Wendy Anderson, [FBPE's lead investigator](#), regularly answers questions from PEs who are perplexed by the process.

Anderson emphasizes that digital signing and electronic signing are two separate methods of signing and sealing final engineering documents and do not relate to each other.

[Rule 61G15-23.004, Florida Administrative Code](#), relates strictly to digital signing and sealing, while 61G15-23.005 is strictly for electronic signing and sealing. Do not conflate the requirements in these rules as they are meant to provide two separate ways of electronically filing final engineering documents.

Based on her conversations with PEs and Agencies Having Jurisdiction, Anderson says that most AHJs prefer digital signed and sealed documents, and rarely accept electronic signed and sealed ones. PEs should confirm the method with the AHJ before submitting documents, she recommends.

To help explain the differences between the two methods, she put together these tips for Professional Engineers:



Digital Signing and Sealing

For digital signing and sealing, you will need to find a certification authority. The certification authority will issue the digital signature and is a purchase that you would normally make. The Board does not approve certification authorities and cannot provide a list of them. You can choose whomever you wish.

You should contact the Building Department or Agency Having Jurisdiction that you work with most often to determine if they have a list of certification authorities to choose from. Unfortunately, these vary from county to county and city to city.

The certification authority will verify your identity and will provide you with a password-protected digital signature file. While it is called a digital signature, it is simply a computer program and is not a typical “signature.”

When you are ready to apply your digital signature to plans, you may choose to use an image of your seal (which you will need to create or purchase separately) and your signature, but they are not required under these rules.

Some Building Departments may not accept plans that do not contain a signature and seal. If that is the policy of that department, you should comply with the department’s request, which is not a violation of the rule.

Digital signing and sealing allows you to apply a single digital signature to a file. The file can contain the entire set of plans, from one sheet or many sheets; there is no limit to the number of pages. Generally, you apply the digital signature to the front page. Some Building Departments may request that you digitally sign and seal each page separately; if that is the policy of that department, you should comply with the department’s request, which is not a violation of the rule.

The rule specifies language that must be placed on every sheet of the plans but is separate from the digital signature. The language must match exactly the language in the rule. You may not place this language in the “digital signature box” that is contained on some digitally signed documents; it must be on the plan sheet itself, such as within the title block.

Do not lock your documents. If you lock your documents, Building Departments that use specific software for plan review will not be able to place a received stamp or notes on the plans highlighting missing information or items that need correction or explanation.

Once you have done these things, you are ready to file your documents. Digitally signed documents must be filed by email or file transfer; they may not be printed and provided to the AHJ.

If an AHJ asks that you provide both a digitally signed document and a hand-signed document, you should print out the document that you digitally signed and then you should hand sign and seal the printout certifying that the original document has been filed with the Building Department; otherwise, you have two originals of the same item and will be required to maintain both of those originals as noted in Rule 61G15-30.009, F.A.C.

Electronic Signing and Sealing

For electronic signing and sealing, you will need to locate a secure hash algorithm, or SHA, generator. It can be a free program.

Once you have finalized your project, you turn the plans set into one file and run it through the generator. The generator will provide you with a string of numbers and letters, or hash, that is unique to that file. You will take that string of characters and create a signature report that you hand sign, date, and seal. The signature report must contain the hash number/letter string and an index of everything that the signature applies to.

As with digital signing and sealing, you must include the language required by the rule on each page of the plans.

Do not lock your documents. If you lock your documents, Building Departments that use specific software for plan review will not be able to place a received stamp or notes on the plans highlighting missing information or items that need correction or explanation.

At this point, you are ready to file your documents. Electronic signed documents must be filed by email or file transfer; they may not be printed and provided to the AHJ.

If you have questions regarding signing and sealing final engineering documents, contact Wendy Anderson at wanderson@fbpe.org.

Former FBPE Chair Kenneth Todd Passes Away

Kenneth S. Todd Jr., PE, of West Palm Beach, Fla., died June 29, 2023, at age 71. Mr. Todd served two full terms on the Florida Board of Professional Engineers from 2012 to 2019 and was its chair in 2018 and 2019.

Mr. Todd retired from Palm Beach County where he served as water resource manager and was responsible for coordinating water-resource efforts with county departments and other government agencies. Prior to working for Palm Beach, he spent 11 years with the South Florida Water Management District, serving as a senior supervising engineer in the Regulatory Department, worked as a design engineer and project manager for several engineering consulting firms, and spent two years as the assistant county engineer for Martin County.

He received a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from the University of Florida, where he also completed graduate coursework in public works engineering. He had been a licensed Professional Engineer in Florida since 1978, and was, until 2019, a Certified Floodplain Manager by the Board of Regents of the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Mr. Todd was a Fellow and Life Member in the Florida Engineering Society, and a Fellow and Life Member in the American Society of Civil Engineers.



Kenneth S. Todd Jr., PE

A Busy Year for FBPE's Outreach Efforts

The annual Florida Engineering Society/American Council of Engineering Companies-Florida conference in July 2022 kicked off a busy year for [FBPE's outreach efforts](#).

From July 1, 2022, until June 30, 2023, FBPE staff, board members, and corporate directors were involved in 20 outreach events: 15 in-person events around Florida and five virtual presentations.

Stephen Kowkabany, PE, one of the directors for the Florida Engineers Management Corporation, discussed professional engineer licensure with over six dozen students and instructors during a Florida Engineers in Education session at the FES/ACEC-Florida conference.

Once Florida's engineering students were back in class, outreach events picked up. During the 2022-23 school year, FBPE staff made presentations to more than 1,600 students in 14 engineering classes or groups at Florida A&M University, Florida State University, FSU Panama City, the University of Florida, the University of North Florida, and the University of West Florida.

During the presentations, FBPE Executive Director Zana Raybon provided the students with information about the [Fundamentals of Engineering exam](#) and the [Principles & Practice of Engineering exam](#), the requirements for [education and experience](#), and the steps needed to [apply for a PE license in Florida](#). Students also had the opportunity to ask questions following the presentations.

FBPE staff also volunteered at the annual Mathcounts state competition and the [ASCE Southeast Student Conference/AISC Steel Bridge Competition](#) in March 2023.

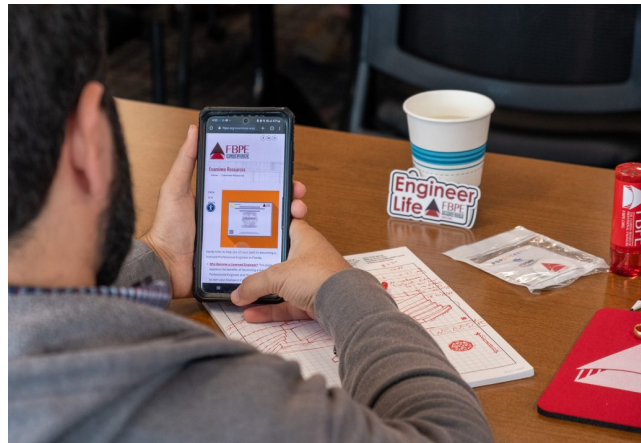
FBPE Board member Dylan Albergo also provided a presentation on PE licensure and engineering ethics to around 60 members of the Florida Association of County Engineers & Road Superintendents (FACERS) in late November 2022.

In addition to [colleges of engineering](#) and [engineering associations](#), FBPE staff also made presentations for Kimley-Horn and Pike Engineering that were tailored to interns and engineers early in their careers.

For more about FBPE's outreach presentations, see the [Events and Conferences](#) page on our website.



FBPE Executive Director Zana Raybon discusses PE licensure at Kimley-Horn in Orlando.



An attendee looks at the FBPE website during a presentation at Kimley-Horn in Orlando.

Special Recognition: Congratulations, Examinees

FBPE applauds everyone who passed engineering exams in the past quarter. We wish them much success as they move towards the next step in their engineering careers. [See the complete list online.](#)

Recent Updates to Florida Engineering Rules

[Chapter 61G15, Florida Administrative Code](#), contains the rules that govern the practice of engineering in Florida. The rules are adopted by the Florida Board of Professional Engineering based on [Chapter 471, Florida Statutes, Engineering](#).

The rules are regularly reviewed and updated by the Board.

The latest changes, as of June 29, 2023, include:

- Rule 61G15-20.0011 *Structural Engineering Recognition Program for Professional Engineers.*
- Rule 61G15-32.004 *Design of Water Based Fire Protection Systems.*
- Rule 61G15-32.007 *Design of Dry Chemical and Miscellaneous Fire Suppression or Control Systems.*

Changes are highlighted in the PDF available on the [Statutes and Rules page](#) in the *Legal* section of the Board's website, fbpe.org.

Legal Department: Latest Engineer Discipline

Pursuant to Rule 61G15-37.001(11), Florida Administrative Code, the Florida Engineers Management Corporation is required to post all Final Orders involving active disciplinary cases to the website until the terms of the final order are completed, or until the licensee becomes inactive, retires, relinquishes the license, or permits the license to become null and void. Included in this section are the most recent cases in which final action has been taken by the Board, a brief description of the licensee's violation and discipline as well as a link to the final order. [View actions.](#)

Mark Your Calendar

We regularly update our calendar to ensure you stay up to date with the latest FBPE and FEMC events. [Check out the calendar on our website.](#)

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