The World Trade Center Analyses: Case Study of Ethics, Public Policy and the Engineering Profession

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The engineering profession has the important role of bringing reality and credibility into public policy discussions. The profession had been held in high esteem because of the standards of excellence and ideals observed in the work of numerous individuals and espoused by its professional societies. The preamble to the National Society of Professional Engineers (USA) Code of Ethics says: "… Engineers must perform under a standard of professional behavior that requires adherence to the highest principles of ethical conduct." Many universities now include engineering ethics in their curriculum. With the array of challenges facing the world, such as global climate change and sustainability, the engineering profession must reassert its previous stature so that it can help build tomorrow's world.

This case study will discuss the reasons for this erosion of the stature of the engineering profession. Large segments of the population in North America see engineering organizations and colleges as failing to refute implausible physics and engineering assertions that dominate public discussions [1]. The result is that engineers are viewed as part of 'the problem' and not part of the solution. Many people across the world question the credibility of professional organizations that are silent about the serious flaws in the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) analysis of the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers and Building 7 on September 11, 2001. Currently, over 2100 architects and engineers have called for corrections to the final official reports [2]. The public has come to expect that engineering analyses would stand up to peer review ensuring that the conclusions are the result of a consistent, transparent and ethical process. Unfortunately, the engineering profession has so far failed to be a dispassionate and ethical voice in politics and society [3].

References:

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