

Construction Law in North Carolina

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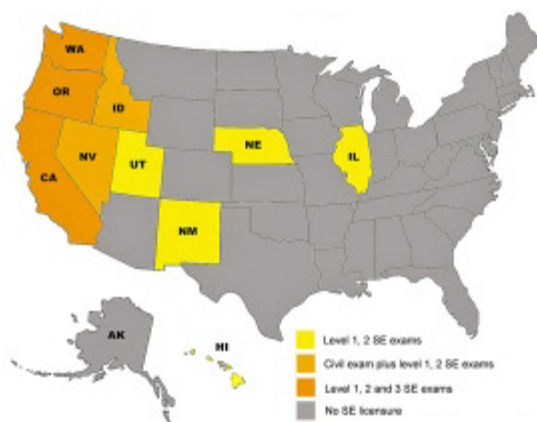
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Specialized Certification for Structural Engineers: a necessity?

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In North Carolina, as in 39 other states, there is no special certification for structural engineers. **As structural engineering becomes more complex, is specialized certification an idea whose time has come?**

“Increasingly, structural engineers, architects and construction firms work together at the earliest stages of a project,” says Jon Schmidt, Associate Structural Engineer and Director of Antiterrorism

Services at Burns & McDonnell and Chair of the Editorial Board of STRUCTURE Magazine. “In today’s world of complex structures and 3D modeling, **structural engineering is a partnership among architects, contractors and engineering firms.** The structural engineer must be able to offer insightful and pragmatic suggestions, and doing that requires strong technical knowledge, depth of experience and problem-solving abilities that have been well-honed over time.

“To this day, only ten states actually license structural engineering as a unique discipline; among these ten states, the requirements vary substantially. This has made it very challenging for contractors to determine what skills and experience structural engineers bring to the table,” says Schmidt. “In the 40 states that do not specifically license structural engineers, they are typically licensed as Professional Engineers. This is a generalist license that does not distinguish between structural engineering and related disciplines such as civil engineering. **As such, engineers in these states are allowed to perform structural engineering tasks, yet there is no formalized way to know if they possess the in-depth skills and experience that can make all the difference in a major project.**” *(For a state-by-state look at the 10 states which do license structural engineering, click on the map above to enlarge the image).*

SECB certification is the structural engineering profession’s self-imposed benchmarking process that was initiated in 2003, when the National Council of Structural Engineers

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Associations (NCSEA) voted to establish an independent entity to develop a process of certification. One of the biggest challenges the structural engineering profession faced, until SECB was formed, was that there were no clear benchmarks by which to evaluate the skill levels of professionals in the discipline.

Eight years after its formation, and over 1,752 certifications later, the goals of SECB remain, since there is still no national licensing process for evaluating the discipline-specific skills and expertise of structural engineering professionals. SECB hopes to transform its certification process into the basis for national licensure.

What do you think? Should a national licensure program be established? What about other disciplines within the engineering umbrella– should there be separate certifications for those disciplines too? From a legal standpoint, if an engineer has the SECB designation, he may be seen as holding himself out to a higher standard of care. With a higher standard of care may come increased liability. Is this fair for an engineer who voluntarily studies for additional certification?

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