



100 Years of Engineering Licensure

A century ago, anyone could work as an engineer without proof of competency. In order to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, the first engineering licensure law was enacted in 1907 in Wyoming. Now every state regulates the practice of engineering to ensure public safety by granting only Professional Engineers (PEs) the authority to sign and seal engineering plans, and offer their services to the public.

To help commemorate the “100 Years of Licensure,” the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) is planning celebration activities, contests, and outreach materials to continue the promotion of licensure and its importance to both the engineering profession and to public health, safety, and welfare.

What is a PE?

To use the PE Seal, engineers must complete several steps to ensure their competency.

- Earn a four-year degree in engineering from an accredited university
- Pass the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam
- Complete four years of progressive engineering experience under a PE
- Pass the Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam

PEs must also continuously demonstrate their competency and maintain and improve their skills by fulfilling continuing education requirements depending on the state in which they are licensed.

History of the License

- 1907 – Wyoming passes the first engineering registration law.
- 1922 – The American Association of Engineers (which later became the National Society of Professional Engineers) put forth a platform for engineering that included the “passage of an engineers registration law in every state and the enforcement of existing registration laws.”
- 1934 – The National Society of Professional Engineers is formed, with the membership requirement of being a professional, licensed engineer. At the time, only 28 states had engineering registration laws enacted.
- 1940 – Between 1935 and 1940, 17 additional states adopted engineering registration laws, partly through the efforts of NSPE members.

1947 – Montana is the last state to enact engineering licensure laws.

What makes a PE different from an engineer?

Only a licensed engineer may prepare, sign and seal, and submit engineering plans and drawings to a public authority for approval, or seal engineering work for public and private clients.

PEs shoulder the responsibility for not only their work, but for the lives affected by that work and must hold themselves to high ethical standards of practice.

Licensure for a consulting engineer or a private practitioner is not something that is merely desirable; it is a legal requirement for those who are in responsible charge of work, be they principals or employees.

Licensure for engineers in government has become increasingly significant. Many federal, state, and municipal agencies require that certain governmental engineering positions, particularly those considered higher level and responsible positions, be filled only by licensed professional engineers.

Many states have increasingly required that those individuals teaching engineering must also be licensed. Exemptions to state laws are under attack, and in the future, those in education, as well as industry and government, may need to be licensed to practice. Also, licensure helps educators prepare students for their future in engineering.

NSPE is celebrating the “100 Years of Licensure” with the creation of an anniversary logo, prominent features regarding licensure on its Web site, a special event at the annual convention in Denver, Colo., and various other special events and contests throughout the year. For more information on the “100 Years of Licensure” celebration, or engineering licensure in general, visit www.nspe.org.