

# Now is the time for Mandatory Continuing Professional Development

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Ontario Land Surveyors have, for the past ten years or so, preferred a process of mandatory special assessment for the provision of continuing education courses and seminars. There is no doubt that the vast majority of members took advantage of such courses and seminars to maintain their professional knowledge and competence, but is this “internal” approach to continuing professional development (CPD) providing our clients with the necessary perception of a well qualified and competent profession?

Mistakes inevitably happen and questions arise about one’s knowledge. However, as seen in most insurance claims, mistakes are not usually about lack of knowledge. But that is what the client assumes and there is no program of mandatory continuing education to demonstrate the profession’s mandate to focus on proper maintenance of the professional’s knowledge base other than our Code of Ethics.

In 2009 the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors and all other Canadian regulated professions and occupations will embrace a nationwide program of equal labour mobility. It will begin with a basic assumption that all members in good standing of a regulated profession or occupation in one of the Canadian regulatory jurisdictions may be granted membership in another Canadian jurisdiction without any requirement to again be tested on material specifics of that profession or occupation.

Eventually this long overdue and necessary approach to Canadian regulation of professions and other regulated occupations will result in common and consistent standards and requirements throughout Canada and, one day, Canadian licenses may replace provincial licenses.

First we need to look at ourselves through our client’s or the public’s eyes. Are we seen as some of the best qualified surveyors in Canada? Naturally we think so but what convinces our clients? In the very visible and public arena of mandatory continuing professional development, we are lacking. That does not mean we are unqualified but it does send a negative message when other provincially regulated surveyors and other self-governing and non-exclusive professions and occupations can demonstrate their commitment to professional development through mandatory continuing education requirements. The public

does see our profession as a highly technical one and all know that technology is progressing at a record pace. Given the rapid pace of technology, how can they be confident of up-to-date, competent professional services?

In the past, members argued that mandatory CPD was unfair to those practicing in rural areas where courses or seminars could not easily be provided. Others criticized schedules that could not be met or the lack of options in schedule and topic. Today virtually all educational material can be made available online through distance learning processes. Materials and presentations can also be provided on demand and thus fit with anyone’s schedule or change in schedule. Quite simply all options are available and, as a technology-based profession, we should be amongst the first to embrace technology for ourselves.

Today’s reality is that there is no downside to a formal program of mandatory continuing professional development. Costs should be equal to or less than the current mandatory special assessment program. Options will increase and members will only pay for what they need and want, not for a program that tries to please all. Public confidence will improve with the demonstration of a profession committed to excellence through a defined and published program of annual professional development requirements. Labour mobility candidates will find a professional home that values its members, that ensures their knowledge and competence and that demands that same commitment from new members.

Mandatory continuing professional development must be enshrined in Regulation and therefore must be accepted by the membership. What better demonstration of commitment to excellence can there be than member approval of a mandatory program of continuing professional development? Professional surveyors in Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have made the commitment and Canada Lands Surveyors are expected to consider a mandatory program at their 2010 Annual Meeting. Ontario surveyors have expressed support at recent Annual meetings to enshrine a mandatory program proposed by the Association’s Professional Development Committee and this can hopefully be accomplished over the next year. 