

# Professional Practice Update & Ethics



## Presentation Team



**Lance Kinney, PhD, PE**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

[lance.kinney@pels.texas.gov](mailto:lance.kinney@pels.texas.gov)



**Rick Strong, PE**  
DIRECTOR – LICENSING &  
REGISTRATION

[rick.strong@pels.texas.gov](mailto:rick.strong@pels.texas.gov)



**Ed Brannan, PE**  
LICENSING TECH REVIEW  
ENGINEER

[ed.brannan@pels.texas.gov](mailto:ed.brannan@pels.texas.gov)



**Michael Sims, PE**  
DIRECTOR – COMPLIANCE &  
ENFORCEMENT

[michael.sims@pels.texas.gov](mailto:michael.sims@pels.texas.gov)

## Webinar Instructions



- Webinar audio can be heard through your computer speakers or phone.
- All attendees will be in Listen-only mode.
- During the presentation, use the Question feature in the webinar software, not the chat feature or the hand raising feature.
- If there are questions, not addressed, please email the presenter.
- A pdf of the slides is available on the TBPELS website.

## Webinar Instructions



- Documentation of attendance for Continuing Education purposes will be the follow up email from the Webinar system.
- Sent within 24 hours. Check spam or junk mail filters.
- **No certificate will be issued.**
- If registered as a group, please keep and distribute a sign-in sheet for all attendees with the follow up email from the Webinar system.

# Agenda

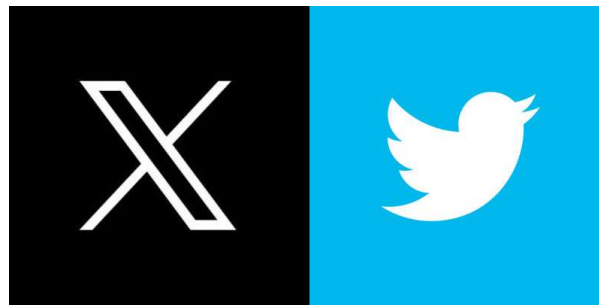


- About the Board
- Core Functions
- Professional Responsibility
- Scenarios
- Board Activities

# Website and Social Media



<http://pels.texas.gov>



# REGULATION OF SURVEYING AND ENGINEERING IN TEXAS



- 1919- Initial Land Surveying Board established for surveying of public lands.
- 1937 – Texas Board of Professional Engineers established in response to New London School Explosion.
- 1955 – Additional Land Surveying Board established for surveying of private land.

# REGULATION OF SURVEYING AND ENGINEERING IN TEXAS



- 1979 – Two surveying boards merged to form Texas Board of Professional Land Surveying.
- 2019 – Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Texas Board of Professional Land Surveying merged to form Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors.



## TBPELS BOARD



### Nine Members - Appointed by Governor

- 5 Licensed Professional Engineers
- 1 Registered Professional Land Surveyor
- 3 Public Members
- 1 Ex-Officio Representative from GLO
- Standard term is 6 years

# TBPELS BOARD



<b>Dr. Sina Nejad, PE, PEng</b>	<b>Beaumont – Chairman</b>
Ademola Adejokun, PE	Arlington
Albert Cheng (public)	Houston
Karen Friese, PE	Austin - Secretary
Coleen Johnson, RPLS	Leander – Vice Chair
Dr. Marguerite “Margo” McClinton Stoglin (Public)	Grand Prairie
Roberto Moreno, PE	El Paso
Catherine Norwood, PE	Midland
Mark Neugebauer, RPLS, LSLS	Austin
Kiran Shah (public)	Richmond – Treasurer

## TBPELS STAFF



### ■ 37 Staff members, Austin

- Lance Kinney, PhD, PE - Executive Director
- Michael Sims, PE - Compliance & Enforcement
- Rick Strong, PE - Licensing & Registration
- Mason Schoolfield- Operations

## TBPELS MISSION



### Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

Our mission is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Texas through the licensure and registration of qualified individuals as professional engineers and land surveyors, compliance with applicable laws and rules, and education about engineering and land surveying.

## BY THE NUMBERS (AUG 2024)



### ENGINEERING

- 154,000 Texas PE licenses granted since 1937
- Approximately 75,000 current PE licensees
- Approximately 11,400 engineering firms

### SURVEYING

- 6,800 RPLS registrations granted since 1955
- Approximately 2,700 current registrants
- 60 current licensed state land surveyors
- Approximately 1,300 surveying firms

# PROFESSIONAL LICENSING AND REGISTRATION



## System to Protect the Public:

- Sets the minimum standards for licensure as a Professional Engineer and registration as a Professional Land Surveyor
- Sets continuing practice and competence standards
- Sets ethical and professional standards
- Compliance with these standards of professional practice
- Standards for indicating competence (titles, seals, etc.)
- Prevents unqualified individuals from offering or practicing where it could endanger the public

# PROFESSIONAL LICENSING

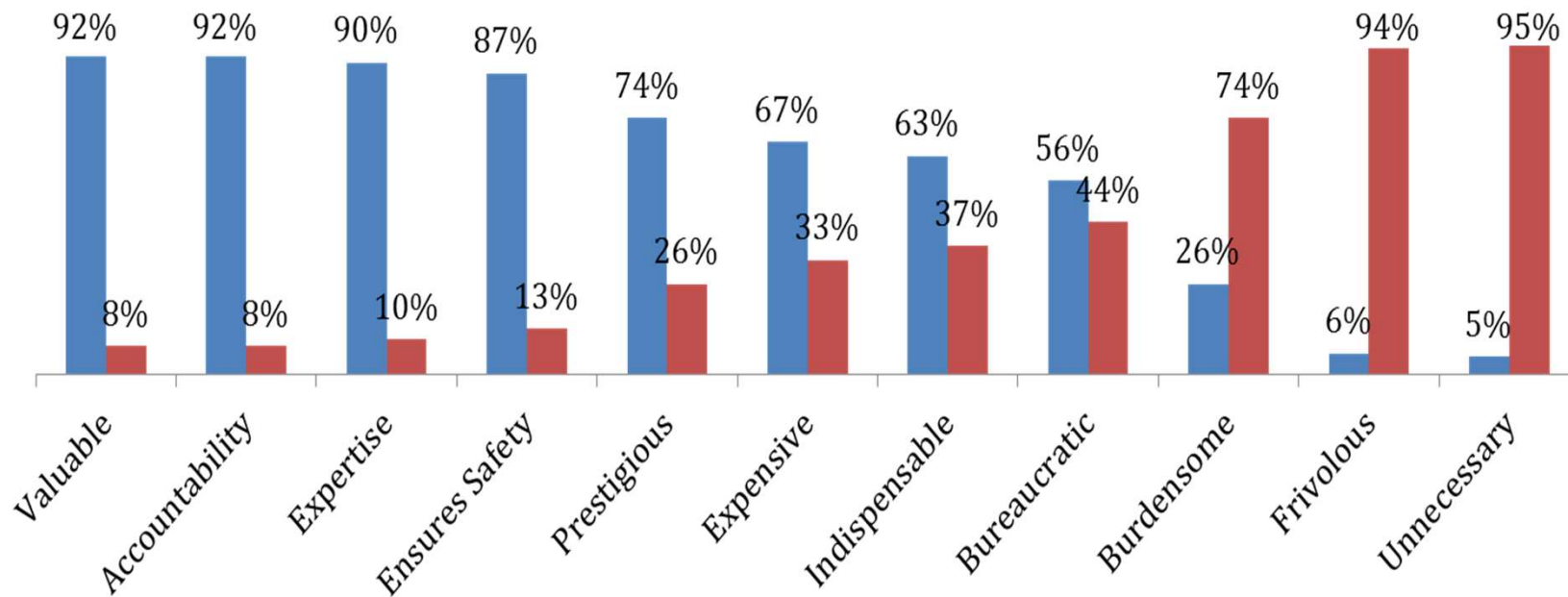


Fields that are regulated and licensed vary among individual states. Among regulated fields are health care professionals (medical doctors, nurses); psychologists; lawyers; teachers; engineers; ...- *Wikipedia*

- Most of these fields impact the public one person at a time.
- The work done by engineers and surveyors has the potential to affect ***many***.

# PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF LICENSURE

**PE+LS**  
Texas Board of Professional  
Engineers and Land Surveyors



Please "click on" and "drag" each of these terms...based on whether you feel it describes professional licensure or not. (N=874)

Survey by McKinley Advisors

■ Describes ■ Doesn't Describe



**Protection of Public Health, Safety, Welfare**

**Professional Practice and Responsibility  
Ethics, Professionalism, Competence**

**Professional Licensure**

**Ethics**

**Education**

**Experience**

**Exams**

# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: ETHICS



- Protection of Public Health, Safety, Welfare
- Ethical responsibilities and expectations
  - Avoid Conflicts of Interest
  - Be a Faithful Agent
  - Be prepared to have a dissenting opinion, if necessary
  - Obligation to be aware of violations of the Acts or Board rules.

How does this protect the public?

- You are expected to know the right thing to do and to do the right thing when engaged in professional practice.

# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: PROFESSIONALISM



- Protection of Public Health, Safety, Welfare
- Communication
  - Honesty
  - Clarity (not misleading)
  - Respectful of all parties
  - Maintain Public Trust
  - Timely communication with the TBPELS

How does this protect the public?

- You are expected to be complete and correct in your practice.

## PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: COMPETENCE



- Competence is gained by Education and Experience; Measured by examinations
- Texas uses nationally accepted standards but considers each application independently.
- Texas does not license by discipline, but Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors must not practice outside of their competence.
  - See Board Rules §137.59(a) and §138.59(a).

# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY



- As a licensed or registered professional, you have:
  - A wide range of actions
  - A wide range of options
  - Legal Obligations
  - Ethical Obligations
  - To protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public
- **Professional Responsibility**

# TEXAS ENGINEERING PRACTICE ACT



## ■ Chapter 1001 of Texas Occupations Code

- Part of State of Texas laws. Any changes must be done by Legislature
- Defines practice of engineering
- Exemptions from licensure
- Structure of the Board, including the establishment of a Surveying Advisory Committee
- Powers of the Board
- Disciplinary and enforcement authority
- Policy Advisory Opinions

# PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYING PRACTICES ACT



## ■ Chapter 1071 of Texas Occupations Code

- Part of State of Texas laws. Any changes must be done by Legislature
- Defines professional surveying and state land surveying
- Outlines the individual and firm registration processes
- Overview of the practice of land surveying

## BOARD RULES



- 22 Texas Administrative Code Chapters 131-140
- Board rules are adopted and amended by vote of the Board after opportunity for public comment
- Expand upon provisions of The Texas Engineering Practice Act and Professional Land Surveying Practices Act
- Board rules must have foundation in statutory authority granted to the Board by the Legislature via the Acts



# BOARD RULES – CHAPTERS



## Engineering

Ch 131 – Organization and Administration  
Ch. 133 – Licensing  
Ch 135 – Firm Registration  
Ch 137 – Compliance and Professionalism  
Ch 139 – Enforcement  
Ch 140 – Criminal History

## Surveying

Ch. 131 – Organization and Administration  
Ch. 134 – Registration and Licensing  
Ch 136 – Firm Registration  
Ch 138 – Compliance and Professionalism  
Ch 139 – Enforcement  
Ch 140 – Criminal History

<https://pels.texas.gov/downloads/lawrules.pdf>

# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY



## ■ Board Rules, Ch 137, Subchapter C; Ch 138, Subchapter C

- Signing and Sealing
- Direct Supervision / Responsible Charge
- Objective and Truthful
- Care and Diligence
- Actions of Others
- Aiding and Abetting
- Codes and Ordinances
- Continuing Education

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# SIGNING AND SEALING



## ■ Signing and Sealing indicates:

- The work was done by the professional OR
- Under the direct supervision of the professional
- The work is complete and accurate
- Preliminary work if properly notated (permit, bidding, etc.)
- Responsible parties if more than one professional
- Date issued
- Revisions

■ **Signing and Sealing indicates your professional responsibility for the work.**

## SCENARIO – PERFORMING ENGINEERING WORK



A homeowner needs a signed and sealed floodplain certification to close on the sale of her home. She does the research on the floodplain to complete the form then asks her neighbor who is a P.E. if he can sign the form to help her out so the closing of the home does not get delayed.

In order to help his neighbor, the P.E. signs and seals the form for her thinking the overall risk associated with this project is minimal.

## SCENARIO – PERFORMING ENGINEERING WORK



This was a violation of:

- A. **§137.33(b)** - License holders shall only seal work done by them or performed under their direct supervision.
- B. **§137.57(b)(3)** - The issuance of oral or written assertions in the practice of engineering shall not be: misleading or shall not in any manner whatsoever tend to create a misleading impression.
- C. **§137.63(a)** - Engineers shall engage in professional and business activities in an honest and ethical manner...
- D. **All of the above.**

## SCENARIO – PERFORMING ENGINEERING WORK



Answer: All of these

- A. **§137.33(b)** – It is not enough to review and seal the work of another person. A PE can only seal work that he or she has personally generated or work that was generated under his or her direct supervision.
- B. **§137.57(a)(3)** – By sealing work that is not his or hers, a PE is giving a misleading impression to the public
- C. **§137.63(a)** – Passing off another person's work as your own would be considered dishonest.

■ “PLAN STAMPING”

## SCENARIO – PERFORMING SURVEYING WORK



What if instead of a flood plain certificate, the homeowner needed a recent survey but was confident nothing had changed with the boundaries of her property and her RPLS neighbor signed and sealed the survey for her without doing any work to verify the boundaries were still correct?



## SCENARIO – PERFORMING SURVEYING WORK



Same issues but in Chapter 138 instead of Chapter 137

- A. **§138.33(b)** – It is not enough to review and seal the work of another person. An RPLS can only seal work that he or she has personally generated or work that was generated under his or her direct supervision.
- B. **§138.57(a)(3)** – By sealing work that is not his or hers, a RPLS is giving a misleading impression to the public
- C. **§138.63(a)** – Passing off another person's work as your own would be considered dishonest.

Still "PLAN STAMPING"

## SCENARIO – DIRECT SUPERVISION – ENGINEERING



You are a licensed professional engineer and supervise others who perform engineering work on your projects under your direct supervision.

After you signed, sealed, dated and issued engineering plans for the design of a hotel, it was found that the design of the support columns holding up an awning over the hotel entry was inadequate and if not corrected could result in the collapse of the awning.

During the project, one of your engineers in training (EIT) performed the column analysis which you used to complete the design.

## SCENARIO – DIRECT SUPERVISION – ENGINEERING



If a complaint against you was filed with the Board what level of responsibility do you and your EIT bear for the apparent inadequate design of the columns with respect to Board rules?

- A. You - 100%; Your EIT – 0%
- B. You – 50%; Your EIT – 50%
- C. You – 0%; Your EIT – 0% - The deficiency was caught and corrected.
- D. You – 0%; Your EIT – 100%

## SCENARIO – DIRECT SUPERVISION – ENGINEERING



Answer:

- A. **You - 100%; Your EIT – 0%**
- B. You – 50%; Your EIT – 50%
- C. You – 0%; Your EIT – 0% - The deficiency was caught and corrected.
- D. You – 0%; Your EIT – 100%

As the licensed professional overseeing the work, it is your professional responsibility that all work is done correctly.

 **You are in responsible charge.**

## SCENARIO – DIRECT SUPERVISION – SURVEYING



What if you are an RPLS who relies on a surveying document prepared by the drafter in your office, but the drafter made a mistake and put one of the monuments 20 feet into the neighbor's property? The drafter is usually very reliable and you didn't notice the error when you signed and sealed the surveying document. The neighbor files a complaint with the Board. Who would bear responsibility in the Board's eye?

Answer: The RPLS only.

As the registered professional overseeing the work, it is your professional responsibility that all work is done correctly.

 You are in responsible charge.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION



- 15 hours for PE / 12 hours for RPLS (based on renewal date, not calendar year)
- Must include 1 hour of Ethics for PE / 3 hours for RPLS
- May include self-study (5 hours max – PE / 4 hours max – RPLS)
- Various other options to obtain continuing education. See Board Rules 137.17(f) and 138.17(f) for full list
- You may carry forward hours for one renewal cycle. Must actively earn required ethics hours during the cycle
- Random audits ongoing; keep documentation for 3 years

## CONTINUING EDUCATION



### ■ NCEES system for Continuing Professional Competence (CPC) tracking and reporting

- No fee to register and create an account
- Upload documentation
- Report as needed for different Boards

■ <http://ncees.org/cpc/>

## COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT



- Technical / Ethical / Professionalism
- Approximately 600-650 Cases opened annually
  - 537 Engineering Complaints (FY 2023)
  - 45 Surveying Complaints (FY 2023)
  - About 60% resolved with Voluntary Compliance
  - About 30% receive guidance for violations or formal sanction
  - Less than 10% Dismissed



## ENFORCEMENT – BOARD ACTIONS



- Reprimands (Formal and Informal)
- Suspension (possible probation)
- Refuse to Renew
- Revocation
- Cease and Desist Orders
- Emergency Suspension

## ENFORCEMENT – OTHER OPTIONS



- Ethics Courses
  - Murdough Center for Engineering Professionalism (Texas Tech)
  - Surveying ethics courses are also provided by the Center.
- \$5,000 per violation per day (Eng) / \$1,500 (LS)
- Restitution
- Technical Courses
- Practice limitations
- Civil or Criminal cases
  - Assisting Jurisdictional Authorities

## ENFORCEMENT – PUBLICATION



- By law, all violations, except informal reprimands, must be published
  - On TBPELS website by Board Meeting Date
  - Added to NCEES Enforcement Exchange (national database)
  - Published in the quarterly E-newsletter

## ENFORCEMENT – LIMITATIONS



- The Legislature has not given the Board the authority to:
  - Assess monetary damages
  - Settle a disputed property boundary
  - Insert itself into engineering or surveying decisions made by local governments or other state agencies
  - Force a licensee or registrant to “remedy” a problem
  - Investigate a registered firm’s business practices (billing, project timing, etc.)

## FILING A COMPLAINT



- Mail, email, phone, facsimile – all are acceptable for initial contact
  - Anonymous complaints are accepted
- A complaint form or detailed letter/email is needed to cover all the bases
  - Forms can be found Online
- Provide specific instances of violation
- Provide evidence to show probable cause

# PREVENTING VIOLATIONS



## ■ CLEAR:

- Communication (between all parties)
- Contract (expectations and responsibilities)
- Calculations and designs (be prepared to support)

## ■ Keep your Documentation

*Most importantly – know the law and contact us if you have a question!*

# ENGINEERING POLICY ADVISORY OPINIONS



- Provision Added to TEPA in 2003
- Allows Board to develop formal written interpretations of law and rules for specific or hypothetical 'Gray Areas'
- ~70 interpretations for a variety of subjects
  - <http://pels.texas.gov/policy.htm>
- How to submit PAO Request / Forms at:
  - [http://pels.texas.gov/Policy\\_Advisory.htm](http://pels.texas.gov/Policy_Advisory.htm)

## RECENT BOARD ACTIVITIES



- Legislative Session Underway
- <https://pels.texas.gov/leg/session-2025.html>
- Bill Topics:
  - 2 year PE / PE Firm Renewals
  - Licensure Mobility Between States
  - Decoupling FS and PS exams and other cleanup
  - Change of Public Works Threshold
  - Military, Military Spouse, Veteran Licensure
  - Other Issues Related to Contracting, Liability, etc.



## RECENT BOARD ACTIVITIES



- Rule package to update licensing rules on criminal history and surveying exam format adopted 2023.
- Rule changes to address surveying education requirements adopted August 2024, not effective until Jan 2026.
  - Same total number of hours of formal education required (32) but now must have 9 hours of surveying, 6 hours of math, and 3 hours of land law.

## RECENT BOARD ACTIVITIES

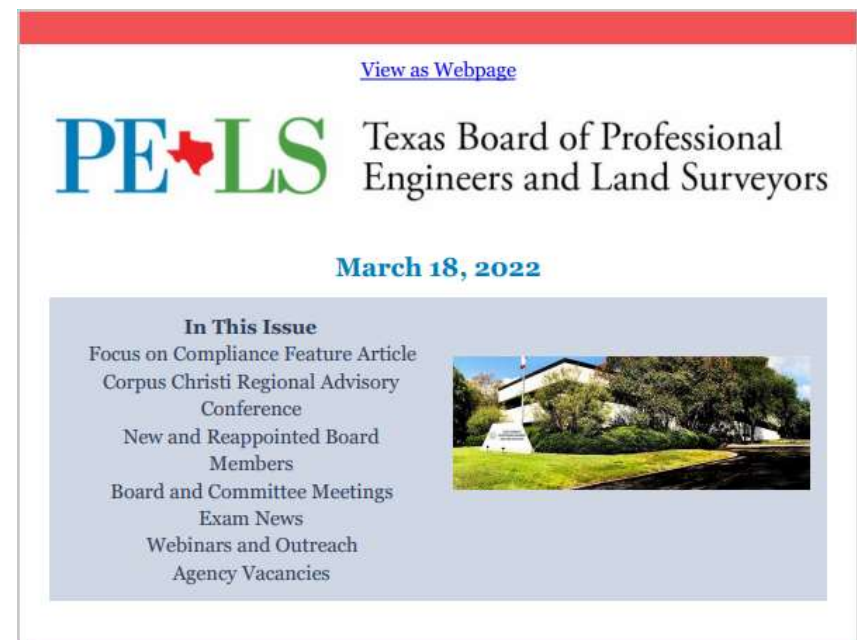


- Clean-up on Licensing Rules – January 2025
  - Update on how to submit references
  - Double counting of engineering and surveying experience
  - Removal of 3x fail for PE (and PS) exam – take until pass
- Comity Rules for Engineering – COMPLETE
  - Formalizes the process to get licensed in Texas if you already hold a license in another jurisdiction
  - Adds licensure process for UK Chartered Engineers

## ENGAGEMENT – E-NEWSLETTER



- E-Newsletter goes out quarterly.
- If you are not receiving it and want it, update your e-mail address in ECHO.
- Also available on Board's website:
  - <https://pels.texas.gov/enewsletter.htm>



# OUTREACH



- ▶ Monthly Open Webinars.
- ▶ Face to Face Outreach or webinars available for your group, company, or conference.
- ▶ Work to accommodate based on staff availability.
- ▶ See Board website to request a presentation.

Fiscal Year	Attendees	Presentations
2017	23,054	144
2018	23,104	168
2019	26,216	154
2020	25,216	91
2021	24,407	78
2022	24,908	82
2023	23,063	76
2024	26,104	76

## ENGAGEMENT – WEBINARS



- Professional Practice and Board Updates
  - Available addressing both professions or tailored to P.E. or R.P.L.S.
  - Monthly, Multiple sessions during renewal months (general)
  - Sign up online
- FE Exam / Why become a PE? (Students)
- FS Exam / Why become an RPLS? (Students)
- How to Apply (EITs and SITs)

# Thank You

## Questions and Answers

- ▶ [pels.texas.gov](http://pels.texas.gov)
- ▶ [info@pels.texas.gov](mailto:info@pels.texas.gov)
- ▶ 1917 S Interstate 35, Austin, TX 78741
- ▶ Phone: 512-440-7723

