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news

Workshop Advances Implementation of Global Principles and Guidelines: Participants Urged to Sign Anticorruption Charter

By Mark Fitzgerald

After more than a year of promoting an initiative aimed at fighting bribery and corruption in the engineering and construction industry, ASCE's outgoing president, William P. Henry, P.E., F. ASCE, called to order a daylong workshop on October 27 in Los Angeles devoted to implementing—nationally and internationally—a set of professional principles and guidelines. Hosted by ASCE's Task Committee on Global Principles for Professional Conduct, the workshop was one of the main events of the 2005 ASCE Civil Engineering Conference and brought together Society members and representatives of many other professional groups and international organizations.

“As engineers our reputation is tarnished because of the corruption in our industry, so we're gathered here today to try and do something about it,” stated Henry at the outset of the workshop, which was filled to capacity. “We have policies and guidelines that we've developed by consensus from various organizations around the world that we'd like to see implemented,” he noted after lamenting the fact that more than \$390 billion is lost to bribery and corruption around the world each year. “Corruption, fraud, and bribery are the result of bad decisions made by individuals, so our approach is to try and help the individual engineer. It is to our advantage that our members fill such a large variety of roles. For instance, those who work for owners can help us push against the demand side of bribery money, while the firms work to reduce the supply side of bribery.” Henry also underscored the importance of education as a

preemptive strategy in curbing corruption. “Perhaps our best asset over time will be our educators,” he added. “We need to give them good information on how to train engineers on ethical thinking and ethical behavior so that the next generation of engineers will have a lower tolerance for corruption.”

In an effort to promote these principles and guidelines, Henry traveled widely during his year as president to coordinate efforts in this area with the leaders of engineering communities in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. “The response to this initiative from engineers around the world has been just wonderful,” he said. “We’ve been trying to build public support for honest practice and make bribery less socially acceptable than it is today by turning up the brightness of the spotlight that we focus on corruption around the world. But we can’t do this alone—we need concerted efforts from firms and individuals all pushing in the same direction. That’s why we would like as many of you as possible to take these principles and guidelines back to your organizations and implement them in your own society in a way that makes the best sense for your particular situation and for your members.”

Participants were also asked to affix their signatures to a charter that would oblige them to “support the formal adoption of these principles . . . build professional and public support for zero tolerance for bribery, fraud, and corruption [and] seek transparency in all dealings with public officials and private owners.” In March ASCE disseminated a draft of a document setting forth principles for professional conduct and solicited comments and suggestions from the 67 engineering societies around the world with which it has agreements of cooperation, as well as from 22 other engineering and nongovernmental organizations and from its many international sections and groups.

While the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC, from Federation International des Ingénieurs-Conseils), the World Federation of Engineering Organisations, and various other engineering and construction organizations have expressed strong support for the adoption of these principles and guidelines, Transparency International (TI), a Berlin-based nongovernmental organization that seeks to ensure probity in business transactions, has been an especially keen partner in this initiative. It proactively fights corruption by blacklisting companies guilty of bribery, and it recently released a report of its own, Global Corruption Report 2005, which details the economic cost of bribery in infrastructure and assesses the prevalence of corruption in 40 countries.

According to Nancy Boswell, a TI leader who spoke at the workshop during a morning panel discussion informed by the theme “How the New Principles and Guidelines Mesh with the Efforts against Corruption by Others,” enforcing these principles and guidelines will be of cardinal importance. “Fighting corruption is not an easy task,” she said. “Enforcement is certainly the challenge moving forward. At TI we have taken a comprehensive approach, knowing that you need legislation and enforcement, but you also need education, you need a free [press], and you need access to

information.” After commending ASCE on the strides it has made during the past year in its mission to fight bribery and corruption, Boswell gave a sober assessment of the task ahead. “What we are looking at today is enforcing the various rules and codes that we have in front of us,” she added. “This will be a tremendous challenge because the vested interests that would like to see the status quo continue are very serious. The head of our Kenyan chapter was taken in by the new Kenyan government to be the head of its anticorruption agency, but he didn’t last terribly long because he started to discover where the corruption was really happening. So he is no longer in Kenya, I’m sorry to say. Unfortunately, this isn’t unique; it happened in Peru and it’s happening literally around the world. When we begin to hit the vulnerable points, things get a little dicey.”

At lunch Ralph R. Peterson, P.E., M.ASCE, the president and chief executive officer of CH2M HILL, delivered an address entitled “Anticorruption and ASCE: Are We Ready to Lead?” He considered the stakes of corruption for individuals, the engineering community, and society as a whole. “There is more at stake here than the theft of money from its intended beneficiaries,” said Peterson, who during the luncheon was recognized as this year’s winner of ASCE’s John I. Parcel–Leif J. Sverdrup Civil Engineering Management Award. “The real tragedy of corruption is that it robs good and decent people of their hopes and dreams and it undermines the legitimacy of society’s institutions,” he continued. “This is also an issue that is highly relevant in the context of global security and terrorism, because global security ultimately depends on strong economies and economic opportunity that [are furthered] through credible government and credible private-sector institutions that are based on the rule of law—and those credible institutions simply don’t exist where bribery and corruption have deep roots.”

Peterson, who in April of this year as part of ASCE’s Outstanding Projects and Leaders (OPAL) program received an award recognizing his lifetime contributions to management, extolled ASCE’s initiative and emphasized the importance of solidarity in a global mission to eliminate corruption. “We can regain the high ground of respect for our profession only through a concerted and synchronized effort on multiple fronts,” he added. “I am more hopeful than ever that this concerted attack, to hit at both the supply and the demand sides of the problem, will bear fruit sooner than later, but ASCE’s initiative is also underscored by the fact that it is ultimately the individual who must decide not to pay or take a bribe. And so I come to you with a call to individual action and individual leadership because it is not enough for each of us to condemn corruption—we must confront it.”

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion that sought to answer the question, what next for meeting the challenge? The discussion featured comments from Jaako Heikkila, Ph.D., P.E., M.ASCE, the president of the Association of Finnish Civil Engineers, Thomas L. Jackson, P.E., F.ASCE, a past president of ASCE and a vice president of DMJM Harris, and Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D., P.E., F.ASCE, the chair of ASCE’s Committee on Professional Practice. “Every time an engineer gets into trouble

we all suffer,” said Jackson. “Any engineer who thinks he escapes a black eye when an engineer in their town is on the front page of the paper for kickbacks or extraordinary campaign contributions or exotic trips is mistaken. All of us have a responsibility to know what the rules are in the areas we practice and to educate other engineers and staff about where to draw the line between ethical and unethical behavior.”

In addition to continuing its effort to garner support for ethical conduct in the engineering profession from all of the world’s engineering and construction organizations, the Task Committee on Global Principles for Professional Conduct—which is chaired by Robert A. Crist, Jr., Ph.D., P.E., M.ASCE, the vice president of operations for Black & Veatch, and includes not only Henry but also Patricia D. Galloway, Ph.D., P.E., F.ASCE, ASCE’s 2004 president—plans to examine the use of hotlines and other reporting systems that encourage and protect whistle-blowers. “The standards of ethics need to be the same for all of us,” Jackson stressed, “because, as an industry, we are all in this together.”