



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Obligation to Client or Employer?

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## Description

Joe Engineer encounters a conflict of interest when attempting to support work he performed for a past employer.

## Body

Joe Engineer worked for a private engineering company in the field of water rights. The firm was hired by a client to complete a water-rights analysis in which Joe participated. Joe, along with one other employee at the firm, stamped the final document. These types of analyses quantify water rights and provide terms and conditions for future use that must be approved by the local courts. Typically, the court process takes years to complete, and in short, it includes the following steps:

1. Application (proposal)
2. Engineering to support application
3. Objections from the public/other water users
4. Rebuttal of objector's comments
5. Mediation or trial

Joe worked on the project up through step No.2 and resigned from the firm to work for the State. The State is typically an objector in most cases, and it is an objector in this specific analysis.

Joe feels that he can and should support the work he performed and which was included in the stamped report, but he is concerned about the remaining steps in the court process. In his current employment, he has been isolated from the State's case in the matter, and his current position does not include opposing this or other cases.

To what extent is Joe obligated to continue to represent the client? In what ways might this cause conflict with his current employer?

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