



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Related Work Done by a Private Party Following Public Employment (adapted from NSPE Case No. 78-10)

Year

1999

Description

The situation of engineers leaving public employ and then working in the same area in the private sector is a delicate issue. The engineer has had access to government knowledge that a private client may desire. This case is an open-ended scenario for discussion based on a case from the NSPE Board of Ethical Review that raises questions about the ethical permissibility of such employment.

Body

After serving the County for many years as evaluator of the engineering aspects of County zoning petitions, Svensen, an engineer, retires and opens a consulting office to engage in similar kinds of work for private clients. Svensen is then retained by a development company petitioning the County board for a zoning variance. He is to testify about the technical feasibility of a major water system and its environmental impact on adjacent communities.

While still in public service, Svensen made preliminary technical evaluations regarding this petition. Citizens' groups opposing the granting of the variance have formally objected to the development company's use of Svensen as an expert witness in support of the petition.

Does Svensen have a conflict of interest? How important is it that Svensen made a preliminary evaluation of this petition while still working for the County? Is there additional information that would change your judgment of the situation?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Related Services for Private Party Following Public Employment - Case No. 78-10](#).

Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

Professional Ethics in Engineering Practice: Discussion Cases Based on NSPE BER Cases

Topics

Employer/Employee Relationships

Engineer/Client Relationships

Intellectual Property and Patents

Workplace Ethics

Conflict of Interest

Expert Witness

Discipline(s)

Engineering

Publisher

Online Ethics Center

Authoring Institution

Online Ethics Center