



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Code Violations with Safety Implications (adapted from NSPE Case No. 89-7)

Year

1999

Description

An engineer discovers deficiencies in a building's structural integrity, and it would breach client confidentiality to report them to a third party.

Body

Metzler, an engineer, is hired to confirm the structural integrity of an apartment building that Metzler's client, Smith, is going to sell. According to an agreement with Smith, Metzler will keep the report confidential. Smith makes it clear to Metzler that the building is being sold in its present condition without any further repairs or renovations.

Metzler determines that the building is structurally sound, but Smith confides to Metzler that violations of electrical and mechanical engineering codes do exist. While Metzler is not an electrical or mechanical engineer, he realizes that the problems could result in injury and informs Smith of this fact. In the report, Metzler briefly mentions the conversation with Smith about these deficiencies, but he does not report the violations to a third party.

Were Metzler's obligations to Smith fulfilled? What about Metzler's professional responsibility for public safety? Is there any information not supplied that would make an important difference in your judgment?

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

Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Duty To Report Safety Violations - Case No. 89-7.](#)

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