



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Affirmative Action in Subcontracting (adapted from NSPE Case No. 92-9)

Year

1999

Description

A disadvantaged firm suddenly charges higher fees to the firm by which it is retained, soon after the parent firm receives much flattering publicity regarding the parent firm's use of the disadvantaged firm.

Body

MST is a large consulting engineering firm specializing in structural engineering. A large percentage of its engineering work is done for public agencies. These agencies encourage MST to use the services of small minority- or woman-owned design firms as subconsultants, especially on publicly funded projects.

For about a year, MST has occasionally retained the services of the Orrin Company, which meets the criteria for a disadvantaged firm as described above. MST has received good public-relations results from this association. The Orrin Company's work is adequate--no more, no less. In a recent article, MST was praised for its efforts to retain disadvantaged firms. Following this, the Orrin Company began charging MST higher fees.

Should MST take action against the higher rates? Is there further information that would be ethically relevant to your assessment of this scenario?

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

Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Use of Disadvantaged Firm After Learning Of Impropriety - Case No. 92-9](#)

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