

The Current State of Professional Licensing of Geophysicists in the State of California

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California is one of only two states that license the practice of geophysics. In the Golden State, a geophysics license is required under law whenever a geophysicist provides their services such that their work is relied on by others, or affects others.

Oversight and licensing of geophysics practice is administered through the Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors and Geologists (BPELSG). The Board's mission is threefold: 1) protect the health, safety and welfare of the public through testing and licensing of practitioners under their authority, 2) deter negligent, incompetent or fraudulent practice via regulation and disciplinary action, and 3) provide information to the public on enforcement actions against practitioners. Under California law, all consumer boards must periodically evaluate changes in their mission and report their findings and recommendations to the legislature, a process known as a Sunset Review. The next review begins in the upcoming 2015 legislative session.

The Board is concerned about the low number of licensed geophysicists practicing in the state and the lack of new applicants for licensing. As it now stands, the number of active, licensed practitioners in the state is less than half the current BAGS membership! Definitive reasons for this gap are not yet known. Anecdotally, practitioners report reasons such as employment in the oil and gas sector (which BPELSG declines to regulate), few employers who require licensure as a qualification, and lack of direct employment by consumers.

Regardless of reason, the low numbers question the need for regulation of geophysics practice by the state. Precedent exists for the elimination of licensing requirements for a profession. So the Board is actively seeking input from the geophysics profession regarding continued support of licensing. BAGS is the largest organization of geophysicists in the Golden State--your advice and opinion will be valued in the upcoming months. BPELSG welcomes your participation in the upcoming Sunset Review and looks forward to hearing from you as the review moves forward.