

## Geoethics 2019

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### Summary

This paper explores the status of Alberta and British Columbia professional geoscientists with respect to their professional codes of ethics and its consistency with international geoethics principles.

### Theory

Geoethics is a comparatively new concept introduced via the International Association for Promoting Geoethics of Geoethics (IAPG) in the late 1990's. It is concerned with the relationship between humanity and the Earth. The principal issues involve the ethical, social and cultural aspects of geoscience education at all levels; the practices of geoscience research and professional applied geoscience. It also speaks to the role geoscientists play in society at large and their responsibilities to the public.

The IAPG defines Geoethics as:

“Geoethics consists of research and reflection on the values which underpin appropriate behaviours and practices, wherever human activities interact with the Earth system. Geoethics deals with the ethical, social and cultural implications of geoscience education, research and practice, and with the social role and responsibility of geoscientists in conducting their activities.”

A Canadian Chapter of the IAPG seeks “...(a) multidisciplinary, scientific platform for widening the discussion and creating awareness about problems of Ethics applied to the Geosciences.” (from the Canadian Chapter LinkedIn Page). It is affiliated with the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences.

The IAPG is a not-for-profit association incorporated in Rome, Italy. It has members from 125 countries on 5 continents. The Canadian Chapter is one of 30 national sections.

The “Cape Town Statement on Geoethics” is the defining document for the IAPG, which arose from the first session on geoethics at the 35th International Geological Congress, held at Cape Town RSA in 2016. The next International Congress will be held in Vienna in October 2019 with the theme of Geoethics and Groundwater Management: Theory and Practice for a Sustainable Development.

### Observations

Practicing Canadian geoscientists need to assess the principles included in the IAPG guidelines to ensure they are consistent with the code of ethics imposed by their jurisdiction's governing legislation.

With respect to APEGA, the concepts and principles stated in The Code of Ethics is a part of the General Regulation (AR 150/1999) under the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act (Ch. E-11, RSA 2000). It requires that Professional Geoscientists “...recognize that professional ethics is founded upon integrity, competence, dignity and devotion to service. This concept shall guide their conduct at all times.”, and in Rule of Conduct 1:

“Professional engineers and geoscientists shall, in their areas of practice, hold paramount the health, safety and welfare of the public and have regard for the environment.”

These are legal obligations and are paramount within the Province of Alberta.

The situation in British Columbia Engineers and Geoscientists Act (RSBC 1996, Ch. 116) is compatible with the Alberta obligations with some differences. The preamble to the Code of Ethics has similar, but different wording from the Alberta Act:

“Members and licensees shall act at all times with fairness, courtesy and good faith to their associates, employers, employees and clients, and with fidelity to the public needs. They shall uphold the values of truth, honesty and trustworthiness and safeguard human life and welfare and the environment.” The first tenet of the principles of ethical conduct states:

“1. Hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public, the protection of the environment and promote health and safety within the workplace;”

### **Conclusions**

The main differences between the IAPG approach to geoscience ethics lies in its emphasis on advocacy of earth science to the public and outreach to young people. The Alberta Act is silent on these matters, referring only to the obligation to serve the public interest. The British Columbia Code of Ethics does oblige Professional Geoscientists to:

“10) Extend public knowledge and appreciation of engineering and geoscience and protect the profession from misrepresentation and misunderstanding.”

Neither the Alberta nor the British Columbia Code of Ethics is inconsistent with public outreach and current practice is in accord with the IAPG recommendations to practitioners.

### **Additive Information**

British Columbia has recently changed its approach to regulation of Professional Geoscience via The Professional Governance Act. The intention of the revision is to strengthen governance of professionals who work in B.C.’s natural resource sector and in other sectors. The links in the References discusses this initiative and the EGBC response in detail. At the time this is written, the outcomes from continuing public consultation are not available.

### **Acknowledgements**

Dr. Jan Boon set the author on the right paths to discover what the world is thinking about earth scientists and professional geoscience, in particular.

### **References**

<http://www.geoethics.org/>  
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