

1810 - Considering hazards both inside and outside the property lines

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Geoscience does not exist as a profession solely to engage in the exploration and production of economic minerals and energy resources, or to provide engineers with geological information necessary for them to design and construct roads and other structures. An essential characteristic of the geoscience profession is its service to the public — to society as a whole. Geoscientists are the scientific liaisons between society and the geological environment. We are society's experts on the Earth: its history, dynamic processes, resources, hazards, and life-supporting environment. With this knowledge comes the responsibility to provide this expertise ethically, truthfully, for the benefit of society. Geologist Bob Tepel refers to the "primacy clause" in codes of professional ethics, which establishes that a professional has an ethical duty to the public. In our professional work the health, safety, and well-being or welfare of the public are paramount.

Securing necessary geological resources and the development of a safe constructed environment are essential to society. How do we accomplish these essential goals in a manner that is both benign and economic? It is our responsibility as professional geoscientists to consider the ways that the geological environment and natural/anthropogenic hazards might threaten the safety and viability of a given project. It is also our responsibility to consider the ways that a given project might pose a threat to the wellbeing of people or the environment, both within and beyond the property lines of that project. Our goal as professional geoscientists is to participate in the responsible development of assets that are of sustainable benefit to society, while avoiding or effectively mitigating and hazardous consequences of that development. Our professional commitment to society requires us to consider the effect of our work on both sides of the property line.