

Cost: \$30 Preregistered members; \$35 non-members/walk-ups

To guarantee a seat, pre-register on the HGS website & pre-pay by credit card.

Pre-registration without payment will not be accepted.

Walk-ups may pay at the door if extra seats are available.

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Professional Ethics for Engineering and Environmental Geologists

Ethics and ethical practice have been respectively defined as “moral behavior” and “the standards of professional practice and morals of a particular profession or organization.” Because a code of ethics is specific to a unique organization, one often finds two professionals acting in what appears to be conflicting situations. Take, for example, an attorney and a Professional Geologist expert witness both involved in the same case and on the same team. The fundamental ethical requirement of the attorney is to be a zealous advocate for the client, while that of the geologist is to be a zealous advocate for the scientific truth.

Ethics, however, are changing: as ethical violations make the news, new laws are enacted to “prevent” the prior ethical violation. With laws replacing ethics, why do we need ethics? We have traditionally not been concerned about “political correctness” in technical presentations; after all, we are discussing a technical subject that relates to the interests of the group we are talking to. In contaminant transport and movement in the groundwater system we might discuss “retardation” and “the contamination is retarded.” Or perhaps in a discussion of magmatic processes and the formation of intrusive igneous rocks we discuss “segregation of minerals” as the magma cools. Someone in the audience may be offended, and files a complaint against the speaker for being offensive, often without being specific as to why or what was offensive. It is critical that we professionals respond to the complaint carefully and completely to ensure our professional reputation and standing in the community. In many of my public presentations and short-courses I now include a warning statement that some of the “technical terms used in this presentation may be offensive if taken out of context and I have no intent to offend anyone but to provide education.” ■

Biographical Sketch

DR. CHRISTOPHER MATHEWSON received a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio in 1963 and Master of Science and Doctoral degrees in Geological Engineering from the University of Arizona

in 1965 and 1971. Dr. Mathewson served as a commissioned officer in the National Ocean Survey from 1965 to 1970, working on ocean charting and marine geophysical surveys in the Pacific and on coastal hazards in Hawaii. Following service in NOAA, he has carried out and completed studies of surficial geological processes that impact public health, safety and well-being and studies of professional ethics. He has presented over 500 papers, published over 90 technical papers, edited 4 technical volumes and is the author of a textbook in Engineering Geology. In addition, he is active in the profession, having served as President of the American Geological Institute, President of the Association of Environmental and Engineering Geologists, Chair of the Engineering Geology Division, Geological Society of America, and many other professional society positions. He currently serves on the Council of Examiners of the National Association of State Boards of Geology, where he assists in the writing and review of the national Geologist Licensure Examination. Governor Rick Perry appointed Dr. Mathewson to the Texas Board of Professional Geoscientists in May 2012. He has received many awards, including the Faculty Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching and the Robert C. Runnels Excellence in Advising Award from Texas A&M University (TAMU), the Claire P. Holdredge Award, the Floyd T. Johnston Service Award and the Karl and Ruth Terzaghi Outstanding Mentor Award from the Association of Environmental and Engineering Geologists, and the Meritorious Service Award from the Engineering Geology Division of the Geological Society of America. He was inducted as a Fellow of the Society of American Military Engineers in 2006. The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents named Dr. Mathewson as a Regents Professor in 2006. Dr. Mathewson retired from teaching at TAMU in May 2011 but continues to remain active in the profession.

