

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

Peer Review Guidelines

PREAMBLE

The California Geotechnical Engineers Association (CGEA) has developed these guidelines in response to numerous inquiries from member firms, as well as those outside the organization, as a means to improve the effectiveness of the geotechnical peer review and plan check processes

Since pertinent conditions and standards of practice vary widely throughout the state and between local municipalities, the goal of these guidelines is to define a set of standards for professionalism on the part of the reviewer. Although technical issues are an integral aspect of most, if not all, geotechnical reports, the vast nature of this topic precludes it from this document. It is also recognized that technical issues are best addressed relative to specific local geotechnical conditions and standards of practice.

GUIDELINES

The geotechnical reviewer's primary objective is to serve the public, the public agency, and to preserve public safety. The public includes future property owners, the general public, as well as the applicant.

The standard of practice of the geotechnical field is highly dependent on professional judgment to provide the most effective investigation and design and may vary considerably between regions. Dealing with variability of projects, terrain, climate, client, and agency constraints requires flexibility and resourcefulness on the part of the geotechnical consultant as well as the geotechnical reviewer. The following items serve to summarize the position of CGEA with regard to peer review of geotechnical reports.

- The purpose of a geotechnical peer review is to check for compliance with minimum code standards, completeness, to note obvious factual errors, consistency of data with conclusions, and standards of geotechnical practice, as well as to identify areas where the proposed design may lead to future significant problems.
- The geotechnical reviewer should recognize that geotechnical engineering is characterized by diverse opinions among the various geotechnical professionals. If the professional opinion of the geotechnical consultant of record is supported by a sufficient level of data and geologic and engineering analyses and professional experience indicates that the recommendations will provide satisfactory performance the opinion of the consultant of record should be accepted. Often times no singular valid opinion or interpretation is possible given the diversity of experience and background of the professionals involved.
- The geotechnical reviewer should be a licensed professional geotechnical engineer, and/or engineering geologist, practicing in the field that he or she is reviewing (e.g. reports by a registered geotechnical engineer should be reviewed by a registered geotechnical engineer, reports by an engineering geologist

should be reviewed by an engineering geologist). The review should be limited to the reviewer's field of expertise, in accordance with applicable licensing laws and regulations.

- All parties should recognize that the geotechnical reviewer is not a part of the design or study team. As such, the reviewers should have limited involvement in the design. The reviewer may be consulted during the design or study to provide preliminary thoughts, opinions, clarifications, or comments regarding critical parts of the design or study. However, in no case should the geotechnical reviewer attempt to redesign the project vicariously through the consultant (i.e., approve the consultants work only after all of the reviewer's design preferences are met).
- The geotechnical reviewer should refrain from superimposing their own personal views unless the reviewer's experience leads him to believe that the recommendations presented will result in significant problems occurring over the design life of the proposed improvement.
- The geotechnical reviewer should assist the geotechnical consultant of record through the permit process, not act as a barrier.
- The geotechnical reviewer should be consistent in his or her review. Theoretically, the same report with the same data, conclusions, and recommendations should generate the same review comments.
- Every effort should be made to be as thorough as possible on the first review so as to minimize the need for additional questions unrelated to those contained in the first review.
- The reviewer should endeavor to maintain open communications with both the applicant and geotechnical consultant of record. Telephone calls to the reviewer should be returned in a reasonable amount of time. Face-to-face meetings should be held if the review process has not shown progress.
- The reviewer should never be in the position to review his or her own reports, or the reports of his or her firm.

The reviewer should be well versed in the state and city code requirements of the municipality which they are reviewing. The reviewer should also be aware of available published geologic and historical information within the municipality.

CGEA

**With over 100 member firms from both northern and southern California,
CGEA is California's premier organization for geotechnical firms.**

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