

Geo-Strata

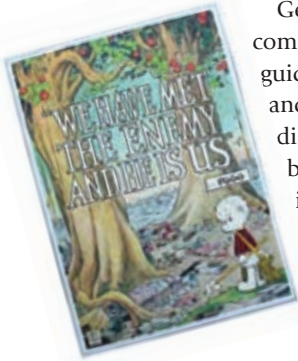
JULY/AUGUST 2010

GEOTECHNICS OF SCOUR AND EROSION



GeoCurmudgeon: A New Purpose...for All of Us

By John P. Bachner



Geo-professionals have become commoditized and marginalized. Their guidance is all too often not heeded and, sometimes, not even sought. That's discouraging for geo-professionals, because they know their guidance is important, and insurance industry experience reinforces that outlook. In fact, geo-professional issues are associated with more construction industry claims than any others.

Because claims can quickly expand to involve all major project participants, all owners, developers, and other members of the design and construction team, they should all want to work only with well-respected, appropriately experienced geo-professionals. By taking that approach, they will lower their own exposure to risk and save time and money, too. But that's not happening, which is why ASFE has adopted a new purpose: to "maximize the geo-professionals' importance and value to the marketplace." Practitioners have welcomed the change, and we're particularly pleased that allied organizations – like G-I – have said they will work with ASFE to get the job done. We're going to do it by "helping geo-professional firms achieve recognized excellence in business and professional practice, and through advocacy, education, and collaboration." And "helping" means encouraging geo-professionals to abandon the practices that have contributed to today's sad status quo.

One of these practices is geo-professionals' willingness to adjust the quality of their service to the budget available, without advising why a better service would create significant value. Another is geo-professionals' focus on papers prepared for professional journals to the near-exclusion of image-enhancing articles – based on well-documented case histories – prepared for the trade periodicals read by owners, developers, other design professionals, construction managers, and contractors. (Give these people a demonstrated bottom-line reason to do something and they'll do it.)

It's also possible that owners and others don't "get" geo-professionals' potential value because all too many geo-professionals use ill-advised, counterproductive methods to manage their risk; e.g., wishy-washy recommendations that frustrate client representatives and can create more risk than they eliminate. Another such measure is seen as unwillingness to accept responsibility. That's appropriate when geo-professionals cannot control the circumstances

involved, but the fact remains that some geo-professionals try to evade responsibility for things they can control, again, under the mistaken belief that doing so lowers their risk; it doesn't.

The geo-professional image is also cheapened by "time-honored" practices whose time has passed: e.g., proposals, reports, and other submissions from various firms that all look and read the same, while incorporating a sedating passive-voice writing style; use of undefined jargon and unnecessarily complex terms; and report organization designed more for geo-professionals than for their clients' representatives.

In short, geo-professionals have become commoditized and marginalized for a reason well-expressed by cartoonist Walt Kelly's Pogo: "We have met the enemy and he is us." As such, there's no point to at this time mounting a massive PR campaign to explain how owners and developers would benefit by treating geo-professionals and geo-professional issues with more respect. Stated bluntly, if geo-professionals want an image for adding value to a project, they have to earn it by becoming better, more valuable – and more valued – consultants.

Fortunately, geo-professionals have a wealth of resources available to effect this outcome. ASFE has developed much of it, and more is available from other sources. We can assume that ASFE-Member Firms that are not already making improvements soon will, and that others – to keep up with the Joneses – will have no choice but to improve, because of new market paradigms.

Unquestionably, the journey from here to there will be arduous, but worthwhile, because, as geo-professionals enhance their value, they will gain:

- more respect from other major project participants,
- earlier and more significant involvement in projects,
- more challenging assignments,
- improved scopes of service,
- less risk of claims,
- lower insurance premiums,
- more profitability of firms,
- enhanced prestige (of being a geo-professional),

- higher geo-professional salaries,
- more top-level students entering the geo-professions,
- enhanced self-esteem and self-respect, and
- more professional satisfaction.

How long the journey takes depends on you. Are you enthused enough to encourage your peers to strive for the “excellence in business and professional practice” that ASFE and other organizations will be promoting? Are you enthused enough to explain and demonstrate to civil engineers, structural engineers, architects, contractors, and construction managers why they should retain – and encourage their clients to retain – top-flight geo-professionals and then listen to what they have to say, just as so many in mining, oil-sands development, rail transportation, tunneling, dam and bridge design, brownfields redevelopment, and construction already do?

Maximizing the geo-professions’ importance and value to the marketplace is probably the most significant and ambitious geo-professional initiative of the last 80 years. We can do it...as long as “we” includes you.

John P. Bachner is the executive vice president of ASFE/The Geo-professional Business Association, a not-for-profit association of geo-professional firms; i.e., firms that provide geotechnical, geologic, environmental, construction materials engineering and testing (CoMET), and related professional services. ASFE develops programs, services, and materials that its members apply to achieve excellence in their business and professional practices. Contact john@asfe.org or www.asfe.org.



Specialized Site Investigation Services

West 1-800-567-7969 • East 1-800-504-1116

www.conetec.com • insitu@conetec.com

Vancouver, BC • Edmonton, AB • Salt Lake City, UT • West Berlin, NJ • Charles City, VA

DBM Contractors, Inc.

Donald B. Murphy Contractors, Inc.

Geotechnical Design & Construction

Design/Build

Earth Retention

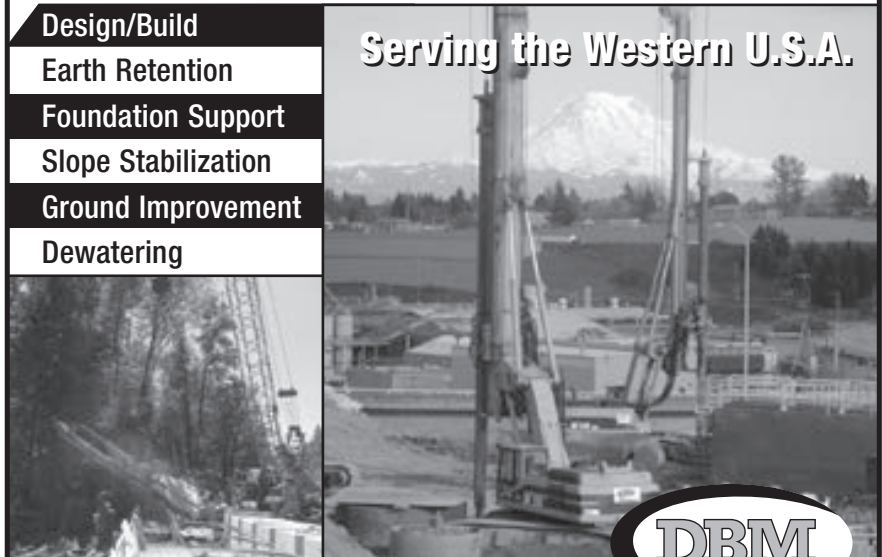
Foundation Support

Slope Stabilization

Ground Improvement

Dewatering

Serving the Western U.S.A.



DBM

800-562-8460

www.dbmcontractors.com