The Engineering Council of Zimbabwe (ECZ) regulating the operations of Engineers and Engineering Technicians.

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The chronicle

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An Engineer is a professional mandated with using science to design and develop equipment, processes and systems that make life desirable and easy to live. An engineer has been defined as, “a professional practitioner of engineering, concerned with applying scientific knowledge, mathematics and ingenuity to develop solutions for technical problems”. Engineers design materials, structures, and systems while considering the limitations imposed by practicality, regulation, safety, and cost. Check around you and admire the fruits of the engineer. You can hardly conduct your business without realizing or utilizing what has been developed by an engineer. This is not at the expense of other professions but just to state the significance of the engineering profession in our lives. It complements and supplements many other disciplines and professions and it is thus equally critical.

There are many people who are illegally practicing “engineering” in this country. The illegality comes from the fact that there is a new (not very new) legal instrument that has come to regulate the operations of engineers and engineering companies in Zimbabwe. This goes for all “engineers” out there and the different engineering disciplines and organizations. In order for you to start or continue practicing legally as either an engineer or an engineering company, you need to be registered and be validly licensed.

The Engineering Council of Zimbabwe Act is now being enforced and among its requirements, there is need for all engineers to be registered and get practicing licenses. The registration process so far in Zimbabwe is through a recognized institution such as the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers (ZIE). What this means is that for one to be registered with the Engineering Council and obtain a practicing license, they have to be Corporate Members of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers (ZIE). When you get your membership from the ZIE, you then proceed to register with the Engineering Council of Zimbabwe. Once you are accepted at the ECZ, you will then be issued with an annual practicing certificate. The certificate is valid for one calendar year and is subject to renewal every year. To maintain and qualify for renewal of the license, one has to accumulate a minimum number of Continuous Development Points (CPD) during the year. These are obtained through among other activities by the activities that the engineer member does in the engineering profession.

With a practicing certificate, an Engineer would then be allowed to perform the duties of an engineer for themselves and for their organizations. This has been necessitated by the need to protect the general public from operations of pseudo-engineers and at the worst “bogus engineers”. The ZIE is a gathering of professional engineers and engineering technicians who come together regularly to discuss issues pertaining to the profession and the acceptable code of ethics. They discuss and share best practices and modern development in engineering. They teach and learn among themselves and beyond. All these operations are done in a controlled and systematic manner. They facilitate growth of
an engineer towards professional conduct. As such they develop an engineer that knows how to conduct engineering activities in an ethically acceptable manner.

We have heard of bridges that have collapsed, building structures that have collapsed, equipment that has failed in operation and designs that have failed to operate as intended. When such things happen, people put the blame on engineers. Yes, it may be them to blame but is it the real engineer who has been involved. If YES, were they following the proper procedures, using the best standards and controlling in accordance with the professional requirements. If NO, why was this not seen or noticed before the disaster could happen. This is what the ECZ is trying to address so as to protect individuals, organizations and the nation at large against substandard engineering practice.

If you are an engineer and you are working as an engineer and you do not have a valid practicing certificate from the Engineering Council of Zimbabwe, you are committing a crime. It is not you alone but your organization is also committing a punishable offense. This is the reason why I said let me inform my fellow engineers out there that there is this legal requirement that we need to comply with and it has become an urgent matter. I say this because beginning this month of July, I attended the ZIE annual general meeting and it became apparent during the meeting that individuals and organizations that are not complying with this legislation will be arrested and prosecuted. I am not being a prophet of doom but am trying to inform so as to have the situation corrected. It may be disruptive to operations.

How then does one or an organization correct this situation if they are not already complying? What you need to do as an engineer is to go to the ZIE and ECZ websites and familiarize yourself with the requirements for registration. Get the forms for registration with the ZIE and start the registration process. If you are in Bulawayo or nearby, you can go to the National University of Science and Technology (NUST)’s Faculty of Industrial Technology and we will be able to assist you. If you are in Harare or nearby there, you can go to the ZIE offices at Conquenar House along Samora Machel Avenue.

The ZIE has areas that are supposed to be active and I can confirm that the ZIE Matabeleland area is active and the members meet once a month. I am also knowledgeable that the Mashonaland, Midlands, Hwange and Masvingo areas are active. This means that if you are an engineer or engineering technician, familiarize yourself with the operations of the ZIE activities in your area. Wherever you are, I trust there are ZIE area activities that will benefit you and your organization. More information about registration and regularization towards the ECZ requirements can be obtained from these forums.

The ZIE Matabeleland area meets every first Friday of each month at Harry Allen Golf Club in Bulawayo. The meeting starts at 1730 Hours and all engineers and engineering technicians are welcome to attend regardless of their registration status. The life of an engineer starts when you are a student engineer, so these meetings are also open to student engineers and technicians from universities and colleges. They are however encouraged to join the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers (ZIE) so that they are not caught on the wrong side of the law.

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