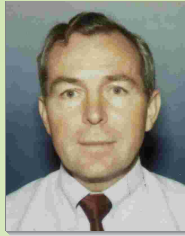


# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



## Why Join a Professional Society?

The reasons why people join, or do not join, professional societies is a question that the Executive Committee of the SLP has been pondering. We are not alone as many professional societies are seeking ways to service their profession, increase their membership base and so become more robust and be able to provide additional services to their members. In many ways the situation is like a chicken and an egg.

So what can a professional society, and the SLP in particular, offer its members?

There are several reasons why people join associations. The American Society of Association Executives conducted a survey of professional membership associations to determine why members join. The top answers, in order of preference, were:

- the ability to make professional contacts and the opportunity to network with people who can impact your profession and give you access to new opportunities,
- friends, jobs, and information,
- being part of the profession and,
- peer recognition.

Consequently joining a professional society is beneficial in providing tangible and intangible benefits for professionals throughout their entire careers.

## Networking

This is important in the specialised area of safety, health and the environment where many professionals are a one-person department. Consequently there is little peer contact in their organization. In a professional association you can become acquainted on a first name basis with colleagues from other organizations. The result is not just contacts, but a genuine friendship among individuals who are all deeply involved in similar activities.

Networking also allows members an opportunity to establish contacts with other organizations, such as consulting and academia. This can have positive benefits for the parent organization as the personal knowledge developed can assist in areas such as choosing a consulting organization or even identifying people from students to professionals whom you may wish to recruit for your organization.

The SLP has a diversified range of members from academics with research specialities, professionals in their respective fields of safety, health or the environment and people in more generalist positions. This provides opportunities for cross-fertilisation which comes from people in closely allied professions. In safety, health and the environment there are many areas of overlap where a different perspective can provide a breakthrough.

## Knowledge

It has been said that the half-life of the

knowledge we acquire at universities for our degrees is five years. It is because of this that many professional organizations (and now the safety officers in Singapore) have a requirement that members of their profession are continuously engaged in professional development. Professionals must continuously upgrade their skills to stay current and competent.

Professional societies provide a wealth of information in their conferences, meetings, courses, plant visits, publications and seminars. The professional societies help to provide the bridge between the academic knowledge gained at university to the application of that knowledge in the workplace. The university provides the tools and education necessary to be a professional. The professional society helps in broadening the experience base for the effective deployment of that knowledge. The parent organization also benefits as the professional society enables members to excel in the performance of their profession in minimising the risks facing their organisation and so help reduce costs/create profits for their employers or clients. This makes membership in a professional organization a win-win situation for the professional and the employer.

Many people become health, safety and environmental staff by default and have not received any formal training in the professions. Professional organizations help by providing knowledge to assist these people in being able to perform their new responsibilities competently.

## Personal and Organizational Status

Active participation in professional societies creates a profile for the participants. Participation can be in the form of writing articles for the society journal, participation at society meetings, participating in committees or making presentations. These help to establish the quality of the professional. For their company, active participation in a professional society by its employees helps these employees to establish their competency and capability and so, by inference, the quality of their organisation.

## Advocacy

The ability to influence the direction of professional areas such as regulations, national standards, codes of practice and technical references is a benefit of being a member of a professional society. There is strength in numbers that a professional society can provide. Many professional societies are invited to be represented in standards organizations and government committees. Through this representation professionals have a means of influencing the technical direction.

SLP Exco. will continue making the case for membership, both individual and corporate. Members and readers should have this "ammunition" ready whenever there is a discussion about why joining a professional organization, in particular the SLP, is a sure winner for all parties.