

## THE INTERNATIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE



Eric Finn, Chair of the International Ethics Committee receives recognition from Past President Dan Beardsly, SR/WA, at the 2006 Annual Education Conference in Denver, CO.

**Ours is a unique profession. And our success as an organization can be attributed to the dedicated members who work toward advancing this unique profession. These members – specifically those who volunteer to serve on IRWA committees – provide the underlying foundation.**

**IRWA's committees form an impressive group of subject matter experts, covering every right of way discipline. In this issue, we focus on the one committee that permeates all right of way disciplines: ETHICS.**

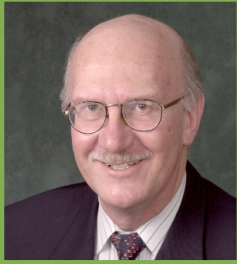
**“An allegation of a breach of an ethical rule is a very serious matter and can do great damage to an individual's reputation.”**

Ethics is often defined as the principles and standards that underlie one's responsibilities and conduct in a given profession. IRWA's Code of Ethics has become our bible – and it serves as an organized group of ethical behavior guidelines that govern the day-to-day activities of our profession and our Association.

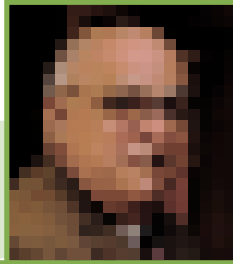
With only two committee members, the International Ethics Committee is highly unique. Not just in terms of its size, but because, while other committees work to promote their activities and accomplishments, the Ethics Committee is deemed successful when theirs are kept under wraps.

In essence, members of the Ethics Committee are official IRWA “problem solvers.” Primarily, they solve communication problems. Issues typically arise out of a lack of communication between parties. Someone feels they were treated unfairly. Or perhaps an employee or agent finds themselves in an unethical position and unable to discuss it with their employer or client.

**BY BARBARA BILLITZER**



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### How would you describe your committee's overall mission?

**Eric:** The overall mission of the our committee is to oversee the professional conduct of the Association's members.

### What are the major responsibilities of your committee?

**Eric:** The committee has two responsibilities:

First is the mandate prescribed by the Association Bylaws to manage complaints against members concerning infringement of the ethical rules. This generally involves being the first contact relating to a concerned individual and advising of the process for making a formal complaint. If a formal complaint is received by a chapter President, the first step is the appointment of an Investigating Committee and the Ethics Committee is responsible for appointing one investigator. Subsequently, the committee manages the complaint to its conclusion.

The second aspect of the Ethics Committee's responsibility is being a source for members on the ethical conduct required of them by the Association. This generally involves telephone or email advice, providing educational sessions at IRWA's Annual International Education Conference, writing articles and instructing Course 103 – Ethics and the Right of Way Profession and Course 104 – Standards of Practice for the Right of Way Professionals.

### What are some of your current activities?

**Eric:** Currently, we are preparing an educational seminar for the Annual Conference in Sacramento. I also completed an article on civility, featured in this issue of Right of Way magazine.

### Can you give some examples of the types of issues you deal with?

**Eric:** Most of the contacts I receive never result in a formal complaint but are usually dealt with by telephone or email communication. These matters typically arise out of a lack of communication between the parties and can generally be dealt with by opening avenues for

discussion. Occasionally, questions are received about an employee or an agent who has been put in an unethical position by the actions or demands of the employer or client. Again, these situations are generally solved once the member communicates the concern to the employer or client. Although few matters proceed to formal complaints, in many of these situations the problem has arisen out of a failure of communication to the extent that one party feels that the treatment he/she received might have fallen below the Association's ethical standards.

### What is your greatest/most recent accomplishment?

**Eric:** At the 2006 Annual Conference in Denver, we had the largest attendance ever for our program titled "Avoiding Pitfalls: Cases from the Pit." The format was a panel comprised of the committee members and a surveyor who had been involved in chairing disciplinary proceedings for his association. The members attending seemed to like the format of discussing war stories of individuals who ran into trouble with the ethical rules of their governing bodies. The feedback was positive and everyone seemed to learn something from the discussion. We plan to repeat a similar format this year.

### What are some major obstacles you face?

**Eric:** Although the Association has a fairly large membership, it is still a closely knit organization where members meet on a regular basis and are all generally well known by each other. This is usually a good thing, but it does give rise to two concerns that I have run across.

First is the issue of confidentiality. An allegation of a breach of an ethical rule is a very serious matter and can do great damage to an individual's reputation. For that reason, it is mandatory that everything relating to a complaint remains confidential and, despite the closely knit network of our Association, the rumor mill on ethical complaints should not exist.

Second, as a practical matter, it has sometimes been difficult to organize an investigating committee where, again because of the close relationships of our members, the individuals involved in the complaint may be well known.

## What made you originally decide to join this committee?

**Eric:** I first became involved in the committee when it was a larger group comprised of five members. Bob Alstrom, SR/WA was the Chair at the time and, as I had been instructing Courses 103 and 104, he offered me a position. He must have thought it was a good idea to have a lawyer on the committee – although I'm not sure whether that was for expertise or whether lawyers often have difficulty with their own ethical responsibilities! In any event, once Bob retired from the committee, I continued as the Canadian representative.

## What have you gained from your participation?

**Eric:** The benefits of being on the committee are generally the same as the benefits of being a member of the Association. I have had an opportunity to meet many interesting members – both in instructing courses and attending conferences and other Association events. It is interesting to see how my attendance at any gathering will often lead to a comment on ethics, generally in a light hearted way, but, nevertheless, it lets me know that people do think of their ethical responsibilities.

## What would you say is your committee's greatest strength?

**Eric:** The committee's greatest strength is its members. As I indicated, when I first joined the committee, we had five members, all of whom were avid supporters of the concept of ethical responsibility

for our members. This has not changed with the reduction of the membership to two. It is important that as the membership on the committee rotates, new members have the same concerns about the role of ethics in the Association.

## What goals do you have for the immediate future?

**Eric:** To complete this interview! After that, the emphasis will be on assembling a new panel of speakers for our "Avoiding Pitfalls" session for the 2007 Annual Conference in Sacramento. Hopefully, in the interim, we will not have to deal with complaints.

## How often do you meet?

**Eric:** With today's technology, face-to-face meetings for a committee of two members are not necessary. I meet with my Vice-Chair by phone and email when necessary, and we always get together at the Annual Conference.

## How would someone interested get involved in this committee?

**Eric:** Because of the limit on our committee size, getting involved is generally a matter of appointment. At this point, I am in the process of recommending an individual to replace myself as Chair at the conclusion of my term in June of 2007. After that, the incoming Chair will be in the position for two years before a replacement member is appointed.

## Code of Ethics of the IRWA

RECOGNIZING the responsibility of our profession to the people and business of our country, and believing that we should encourage and foster high ethical standards in our profession, we do hereby adopt the following CODE OF ETHICS for our constant guidance and inspiration predicated upon the basic principals of truth, justice and fair play.

**To show faith** in the worthiness of our profession by industry, honesty and courtesy, in order to merit a reputation for high quality of service and fair dealing.

**To add to the knowledge** of our profession by constant study and to share the lessons of our experience with our fellow members.

**To build an ever increasing confidence and good will** with the public and our employers by poise, self-restraint and constructive cooperation.

**To ascertain and weigh all of the facts** relative to real properties in making an appraisal thereof, using the best and most approved methods of determining the just and fair market value.

**To conduct ourselves in the most ethical and competent manner** when testifying as an expert witness in court as to the market value of the real properties, thus meriting confidence in our knowledge and integrity.

**To accept our full share of responsibility** in constructive public service to community, state and nation.

**To strive to attain and to express a sincerity of character** that shall enrich our human contacts, ever aiming toward that ideal -- "The Practice of the Golden Rule."

*For more information on the International Ethics Committee, visit [www.irwaonline.org](http://www.irwaonline.org).*