



# THE ASSOCIATION AND ITS ETHICAL PRACTICES

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As IRWA members, we have seen with pride the level of professionalism demonstrated by both the public and private sectors of our industry. As we continue moving forward with new programs and partnerships, our right of way professionals are getting more opportunities to have a seat at the table and play a larger role on projects and teams.

It is essential that, as the field of right of way gains greater exposure and recognition, we acknowledge who we are as individuals. We are ordinary people who are making a difference, who feel passionate about our work, and not only understand what is right and wrong, but also what is fair and reasonable.

## THE ASSOCIATION'S ETHICAL CODE

Our ethical conduct is evident in all of our interactions, and can impact the people, companies and agencies we are associated with on a daily basis. When you consistently demonstrate sterling ethics, your organization is more likely to keep you employed, promote you, or give you a raise, and you'll earn the respect of your colleagues and clients as well.

No matter what position you occupy within your organization or company, you may at one time or another be tempted to go against your own ethical principles. Imagine being asked by your boss to do something that is ethically or legally questionable. Or perhaps you find yourself torn between covering up a mistake or owning up to it. While you can talk yourself into just about any decision, knowing the ethical gray areas will help guide you toward making the best decision.

Like other large organizations, our Association has a set of ethical codes for its members. Our code of conduct has been published with both general parameters, as in the Code of Ethics, and in more specific detail in the Rules of Professional Conduct and the Standards of Practice for the Right of Way Professional. In addition, IRWA has a set of procedural rules to follow, called the Disciplinary Procedures, which sets forth the process for filing an ethics complaint against a member who is believed to have violated one of the ethics rules.

By fully understanding and upholding the IRWA Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Procedures, you are communicating to the professional world that you are a

person of honor and integrity, and that you can be trusted by clients and colleagues to do the right thing. You will also be ensuring that IRWA holds its membership to the highest ethical standards.

### ELEVATING OUR STANDARDS

From time to time, the International Ethics Committee reviews all of the ethics documentation to ensure everything is up-to-date and meets current standards in the various industries the Association represents. Over the past several years, the Committee and its Task Force team have been working to improve and clarify the Disciplinary Procedures so that they are more meaningful to members and more enforceable by the Association. The latest effort was a comprehensive review and revision by a multi-disciplined task force from across the Association.

In the coming months, you will be hearing more about the changes being brought to you by the Ethics Committee Task Force. For those members who attended their Region's Spring Forum, the proposed changes were presented. Others may have received this information from their chapters. A discussion of ethics among your coworkers and fellow members is encouraged. It is important that all members take time to review the changes suggested by the Ethics Committee Task Force.

### TOOLS AVAILABLE ONLINE

One of the challenges with using good ethical judgment may stem from being unfamiliar with all of the tools available. It may be an eye-opening experience for those reviewing our Association's Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Procedures for the first time. There are so many nuances of ethics, some of which can be quite subtle. Understanding the IRWA Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Procedures will better prepare you to make good decisions and stay on the high road.

We encourage interested members to visit the IRWA Member Network where documents have been posted in the "Resources" section for review. You may also contact your Chapter President who was provided with a report by the Ethics Committee on the status of the changes. For those attending the Annual Conference in Charleston, WV, a question and answer session on the proposed changes is scheduled for Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is invited to attend.

At the upcoming Annual Board of Directors Meeting, the voting directors will have an opportunity to vote on the changes brought to the membership by this Committee. We feel confident that the approval of the revised Disciplinary Procedures will put us on the path toward ensuring our profession is steered by guidelines that reflect the highest possible professional standards.

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### THE VOICE WITHIN

Business ethics speaks to the importance of listening to the voice within that keeps you on the right track. While there are those who demonstrate a philosophy of ethics in both their professional and private lives, there are also some who cross the line of ethical behavior to varying degrees. High ethical standards convey that you are committed to being true to your word. When clients trust that you mean what you say, they are more likely to continue giving you their business and recommending you to others.

Trustworthiness isn't just a nicety of doing business. It is a necessity in the right of way profession. It is through our combined efforts and a continued focus on our high ethical standards at every level that we can ensure our profession progresses and evolves for the better.



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*As Real Property Manager for the County of Santa Barbara, Ronn has over 30 years of public real estate experience involving all aspects of the right of way profession. He is an IRWA Instructor for Ethics Courses 103 and 104. He has served as Chapter President, Region Chair and Vice Chair, Chair and Vice Chair on several International Committees and as a member on various task forces. Ronn has also published articles on the value of membership.*