Michigan Laws and Rules Governing Professional Engineer Seals

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Approved for: Michigan

State Board Approvals

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Introduction and Purpose

Professional engineers licensed in Michigan have a legal and ethical obligation to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. One of the most important ways this duty is fulfilled is through the proper sealing and signing of engineering documents.

A professional seal on plans, drawings, reports, or specifications is not just a formality. It is a legal declaration that the licensed engineer has prepared, reviewed, or taken responsibility for the work, confirming that it meets applicable standards and regulations. The seal signifies that the engineer accepts professional accountability for the document's accuracy and safety.

Statutory Basis: MCL 339.2007

Michigan's Occupational Code (MCL 339.2007) requires that any engineering plans, specifications, reports, or other documents filed for public approval must be sealed and signed by a licensed professional engineer who either prepared them personally or directly supervised their preparation. This requirement ensures that only qualified, licensed professionals take responsibility for documents that affect public safety. The law also requires that any changes to sealed documents must be resealed and resubmitted, maintaining professional accountability for revisions.

Regulatory Basis: Admin Code R 339.16032

The Michigan Administrative Code (R 339.16032) establishes specific requirements for the design and use of professional engineer seals. It mandates that the seal be circular and include the words STATE OF MICHIGAN, LICENSED PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER, as well as the engineer's name and license number. The seal must be clear, legible, and reproducible, ensuring that it can be verified on all copies of the document.

Protecting Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

The Michigan Board of Professional Engineers enforces these requirements to uphold professional responsibility and protect the public welfare. By requiring engineers to seal and sign their work, the Board ensures that critical engineering documents are prepared under the supervision of qualified professionals. This system safeguards the public from unsafe or unapproved designs and holds engineers personally accountable for the quality and compliance of their work. Proper sealing and signing is therefore both a legal obligation and an ethical duty, reinforcing public trust in the engineering profession.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Explain the legal and ethical significance of sealing and signing engineering documents in Michigan.
- Identify when sealing is required, including responsibilities for work prepared under direct supervision and for revisions.
- Describe the statutory authority of Michigan's Occupational Code (MCL 339.2007) and its requirements for sealing.
- Recognize the detailed design and content requirements for seals under Michigan Administrative Code R 339.16032.
- Understand the rules and best practices for using electronic seals securely and maintaining document integrity.
- Review and assess work prepared by others, perform necessary evaluations, and ensure corrections are made before sealing.

Apply best practices to control access to seals, maintain clear records, and ensure accountability for all versions of sealed work.

Meaning of the PE Seal

The professional engineer's seal is far more than a mark on a document. In Michigan, it carries both ethical and legal significance, serving as a formal declaration that the work has been prepared or thoroughly reviewed by a licensed professional who accepts full responsibility for its contents.

Applying the seal represents personal responsibility for the accuracy, safety, and compliance of engineering documents. When an engineer seals and signs plans, specifications, or reports, they confirm that the work meets applicable standards, codes, and regulations. It shows that the engineer has exercised their professional judgment and due diligence in reviewing or preparing the document.

The seal also provides public assurance of competence. It tells clients, regulatory agencies, and the general public that the document was produced under the supervision of someone with the training, experience, and ethical commitment required to safeguard health, safety, and welfare. The presence of a licensed engineer's seal is a critical safeguard that maintains trust in the built environment and infrastructure systems.

However, misuse of the seal can constitute professional misconduct with serious consequences. Examples include sealing work not prepared under your supervision, failing to reseal documents after changes, or allowing unauthorized use of your seal. These actions can lead to disciplinary action by the licensing board, including suspension or revocation of the professional license. Misuse undermines public trust and can expose the public to unsafe designs. It is the engineer's duty to use their seal carefully, honestly, and in full compliance with Michigan's legal and ethical standards.

When Sealing is Required

In Michigan, professional engineers are required by law to seal and sign any engineering plans, drawings, specifications, or reports that are filed for public approval or used for regulatory review. This requirement ensures that critical engineering documents are prepared under the direct supervision of a qualified professional who takes full responsibility for their accuracy, safety, and compliance with applicable standards.

Sealing is required not only for work an engineer personally prepares but also for work prepared under their direct supervision. This means the engineer must be actively involved in overseeing the work, reviewing it for accuracy, and ensuring that it meets all professional standards and regulations. Simply reviewing work after the fact without meaningful supervision does not meet this requirement.

When changes or revisions are made to previously sealed documents, those changes require resealing. The engineer must review and approve the revisions, then apply their seal and signature again to confirm that the updated work meets all necessary standards. This ensures accountability for all versions of the document and maintains a clear record of professional responsibility for each stage of the project.

It is also important to understand the scope of engineering work that requires sealing. Any work that involves engineering analysis, design, or technical documentation that affects public safety or compliance with codes typically requires a licensed engineer’s seal. Administrative changes or clerical edits do not require sealing, but any substantive technical changes must be reviewed and sealed by the responsible professional engineer.