



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

## **Public Criticism of Safety (adapted from NSPE Case No. 88-7)**

### **Year**

1999

### **Description**

A case in which an engineer agrees to take a job for the local newspaper, which misrepresents the engineer's professional opinion.

### **Body**

Garcia, a renowned structural engineer, is hired for a nominal sum by a large city newspaper to visit the site of a State bridge-construction project. This project has been plagued by construction delays, cost increases, and litigation, primarily as a result of several well publicized on-site accidents.

Garcia visits the bridge and performs a one-day visual inspection. In very general terms, her report identifies potential problems and proposes additional testing and other solutions. In a series of feature articles based on Garcia's report, the newspaper alleges that the bridge has major safety problems that will jeopardize its completion date. Allegations of misconduct and incompetence are made against the project engineers, the contractors, and the State highway department. The State holds an investigation, in which Garcia states that her report only identified potential problems with the safety of the bridge and was not intended to be conclusive.

Do you think it was ethical for Garcia to perform an investigation for the newspaper

in the manner stated? In light of this experience, what safeguards might an engineer seek as a condition of accepting an assignment like Garcia's?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

## **Notes**

See the original NSPE case at: [Public Criticism of Bridge Safety - Case No. 88-7](#).

## **Rights**

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## **Resource Type**

Open-ended scenario

## **Parent Collection**

Professional Ethics in Engineering Practice: Discussion Cases Based on NSPE BER Cases

## **Topics**

Safety

Public Health and Safety

Communicating Science and Engineering

## **Discipline(s)**

Engineering

## **Publisher**

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