

# Field Notes

## From the Chairman: Death by Standardization

Tim Cawood, McKim & Creed

We are nearly half way through the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2011. Wow, where does the time go? From what I am seeing from around the country, things are getting better and everyone is feeling pretty good regarding the remainder of the year. Is it because we've right sized and stopped losing money, which feels great after what we've been through, or is it because the economy has turned and is truly in a real recovery mode? I'm going to answer that with another question: *Have we set the bar so low because we're still sore or, are we enthusiastic and pursuing new ideas and technologies, or even new markets to become, perhaps better the ever?* If you've read my comments before, you've already heard about my optimistic view that there are great opportunities out there but they won't be knocking on your door looking for you like we once experienced.

Now that I've got your attention and maybe even have you bowed up a little with the title of this article, (sorry) let's talk about standardization. Standardization is important and necessary. It increases productivity and reduces risk, all very good things. But it can also be strangling.

Ok, maybe "standardization" is the wrong term here, no need to debate definitions. My point is that the ability to **adapt**, to change methods and techniques, to be open to and embrace the new technologies that we see developing around us everyday, versus doing things "the way we've always done it," will mean **the difference between surviving and thriving.**

As an example, our firm policy is that we do not support the use of personal phones on the job. We provide our staff (party chiefs only) with basic cell phones, no internet, YouTube, Twitter or even texting. The thought was that these applications would be a distraction, non-productive, and be abused. Management, including myself, felt pretty strongly about this policy. We had visions of the survey crews sitting in the heated truck watching The Jersey Shore or Family Guy and eating popcorn instead of working.



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Looking for information to help your firm?

Check out the COPS Members Only site for templates, guides and contracts!

## From the Chairman (cont...)



About a month ago, one of our managers noticed while on a site visit that one of our younger party chiefs was walking through the woods with his crew and equipment intently looking at his smart phone. The project was a route survey for a proposed new gas transmission line and the crew was performing property reconnaissance and boundary location in support of easement surveys. This particular crew had the best production, and seemed to find more existing property corners than any other crew. When the manager investigated he found that the party chief was using his personal smart phone in GPS navigation mode (it even had WAAS). He had the latest county orthophotography and county tax parcel data loaded and was navigating in real time with his phone to the approximate property corner location to do his search. He was saving hours per day and getting a better result, a win/win no matter how you look at it. Wow it was awesome! Not only did this kid need a reward, *we needed to change our policy.*

That's face it, like it or not we are in a highly technical industry. GPS, GIS, laser scanners are changing the way we do things. It is no secret that the average age of the professional surveyor is now approaching 60. Generally, we are detailed oriented, somewhat conservative by nature and resistant to change. At a glance the cost of the technology seems high but, in my opinion, it is, or soon will be the cost of doing business in the field of Geomatics.

### How can COPS help?

As you know COPS focuses on helping member firms with Business Practices issues versus technical issues so how is this message relevant, you might ask?

Technology is a tool. We still have to get work, do work, hire staff, manage assets (people and equipment), and do it safer, faster and better than ever before. COPS develops products to help you do all this "stuff."

*In 2010 COPS released 2 new "Go-No Go" forms and an "Employee Interview Guide."* An updated Health and Safety Manual will be released any day and we are currently working on 2 new products to be released this.

As a member of COPS you will have access to these brand new developing documents as well as the library of other products produced by surveyors for surveyors. Also as a member you can participate in quarterly meetings or volunteer for a committee where you will can share ideas and interact with some leaders in the surveying profession from throughout the country.

Thanks, as always,

Tim





## COPS Winter Meeting in San Diego



COPS had a great meeting this January in sunny and *warm* Sand Diego. No one is mourning the end of 2010—the general consensus being that this year was rock bottom of the recession—hoping 2011 will be the return of prosperity to our industry.

The Business Practices Committee is working on an update to the Health and Safety Manual, including requiring CPR and First Aid training for all field employees. Target date for release is March 2011.

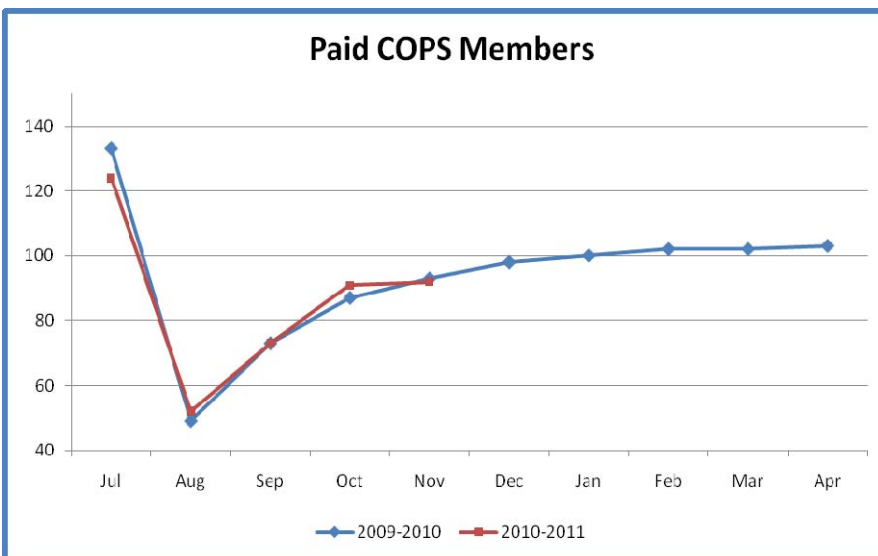
### LINKS YOU CAN USE!

<http://freegeographytools.com/2009/national-geodetic-survey-marker-positions-and-info-in-google-earth>

The US National Geodetic Survey has produced [DS World](#), a **free program** that can query their database for the positions of geodetic survey marker stations based on either state/county, distance from a fixed coordinate, or Project ID. It then produces a KML file with their locations and loads it into Google Earth. For example, to get county data, choose Stations => By State and County, then select the state and county from the successive dropdown menus that appear.



## COPS MEMBERSHIP UPDATE



Though we began the year about 10 firms down from where we ended 2009-2010, payments have been steady and we have done a great job of retaining firms.

If you know any firm that would be interested in COPS, have them contact Heather Talbert at (202) 682-4337 or [htalbert@acec.org](mailto:htalbert@acec.org).

## ACEC ANNUAL CONVENTION & LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT



Join COPS and ACEC for the 2011 Spring Conference in Washington, DC. This year will prove to be a spectacular event. Join us in DC at the height of the Cherry Blossom Festival and you will have opportunities to meet and speak with your state's elected officials, as well as take advantage of ACEC's top-notch educational program.

Highlights for Surveying firms include:

- ⇒ Education Session led by Adam Ducker, RCLCO—"Positioning Your Firm for Future Success in Land Development"
- ⇒ COPS Member Briefing on "hot topics" and the efforts of the coalition
- ⇒ Briefing for Surveyors and LDC Members on the state of the industry
- ⇒ CEO Roundtables
- ⇒ Coalition Meet and Greet—an opportunity to interact (and belly up!) with State MO Directors, Coalition Leadership, and your peers

For more information and to register, go to [www.acec.org/conferences/annual11/](http://www.acec.org/conferences/annual11/)

Hotel rooms are going fast, so register now!



## ACEC Education Opportunities

### February 16

#### ***An Inside View of Programs and Funding of Rural Development, USDA***

***Learn how RD money is distributed, and opportunities available for engineering services.***

Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, distributes over \$1.5 billion annually in loans and grants. **Ben Shuman**, Senior Environmental Engineer, USDA, will describe how RD money is distributed and where engineers and local communities fit into the picture. Participants will get an update on the status of a sizable Farm Bill currently in the works and details on potential benefits at the local level.

### February 17

#### ***The Perfect Storm—A Bad Lawsuit, A Bad Contract, Indemnification and The Duty to Defend***

***A look at recent case law, contractual clauses that can help manage A/E risk.***

In this timely and important risk management online seminar, **Christine Drage**, Esq., Weil & Drage, APC, will focus on and detail key issues related to public and private A/E professional services contracts. Agenda topics include the contractual duties to defend and indemnify, and the practical reality of what happens in a lawsuit when a firm has a bad lawsuit, a bad contract, indemnification obligations and the duty to defend.

For more information or to register for any of these seminars, visit the ACEC Education page at <http://www.acec.org/education/index.cfm> or contact La'Creshea Makonnen at (202) 682-4338 or [lmakonnen@acec.org](mailto:lmakonnen@acec.org).



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AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ENGINEERING COMPANIES



**INSTITUTE FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**



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The Council of Professional Surveyors (COPS) is a national association of surveying firms that provides a forum for members to improve the quality of the surveying profession through enhancement of business practices, reduced professional liability exposure and increased profitability.

Our mission is to strengthen the business environment and image of member firms, focusing on quality professional surveying services in a competitive global marketplace.

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**Calendar of Events**

**March 30-April 2: 2011 ACEC Annual Convention**  
Washington, DC

**October 19-22: 2011 ACEC Fall Conference**  
Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas, NV

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**COPS STEERING COMMITTEE**



The following COPS Steering Committee members are here to serve your needs. Please feel free to contact any of the members at their email addresses shown below.

**Chairman:** **Tim Cawood**, McKim & Creed [tcawood@mckimcreed.com](mailto:tcawood@mckimcreed.com)

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