

CHAPTER 1053
COMPLAINTS, INVESTIGATIONS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

[Prior to 11/14/01, see 193C—Chapter 4]
[Prior to 6/24/26, see Engineering and Land Surveying Examining Board[193C] Ch 9]

Chapter rescission date pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.7: 4/10/29

481—1053.1(542B) Complaints and investigations.

1053.1(1) *Complaints.* The board, upon receipt of a complaint or upon its own motion pursuant to other evidence received by the board, reviews and investigates alleged acts or omissions that reasonably constitute cause under applicable law or administrative rule for licensee discipline. Complaints may be submitted to the board office via the board's website by members of the public, including clients, business organizations, nonprofit organizations, governmental bodies, licensees, or other individuals or entities with knowledge of possible violations of laws or rules by licensees.

1053.1(2) *Form and content.* A written complaint may be submitted on forms available from the board office and on the board's website. The written complaint shall include the following information:

- a. The full name, address, and telephone number of complainant.
- b. The full name, address, and telephone number of the individual against whom the complaint is filed.
- c. A statement of the facts and circumstances giving rise to the complaint, including a description of the alleged acts or omissions that the complainant believes demonstrate that the respondent has violated or is violating laws or rules enforced by the board.
- d. Citation of the statutes and administrative rules allegedly violated by the respondent.
- e. Evidentiary supporting documentation.
- f. Steps, if any, that have been taken by the complainant to resolve the dispute with the respondent prior to the filing of the complaint.

1053.1(3) *Initial complaint screening.* All written complaints received by the board are initially screened by the board's administrator to determine whether the allegations of the complaint fall within the board's investigatory jurisdiction and whether the facts presented, if true, would constitute a basis for disciplinary action against a licensee. Complaints that are clearly outside the board's jurisdiction, which clearly do not allege facts upon which disciplinary action would be based, or that are frivolous will be referred by the board administrator to the board for closure at the next scheduled board meeting. All other complaints are referred by the board administrator to the board's disciplinary committee for committee review.

1053.1(4) *Investigation of allegations.* In order to determine if probable cause exists for a hearing on the complaint, the board may cause an investigation to be made into the allegations of the complaint. It may refer the complaint to a peer review committee or investigator for investigation, review and report to the board.

1053.1(5) *Informal discussion.* If the board considers it advisable, or if requested by the affected licensee, the board may grant the licensee an opportunity to appear before the board or a committee of the board for a voluntary informal discussion of the facts and circumstances of an alleged violation. The licensee may be represented by legal counsel at the informal discussion. It is not necessary for the licensee to attend the informal discussion. By electing to attend, the licensee waives the right to seek disqualification, based upon personal investigation of a board member or staff, from participating in making a contested case decision or acting as a presiding officer in a later contested case proceeding. Because an informal discussion constitutes a part of the board's investigation of a pending disciplinary case, the facts discussed at the informal discussion may be considered by the board in the event the matter proceeds to a contested case hearing and those facts are independently introduced into evidence. The board may seek a consent order at the time of the informal discussion. If the parties agree to a consent order, a statement of charges will be filed simultaneously with the consent order.

1053.1(6) *Immunity.* Complainants are immune from civil liability under Iowa Code section 272C.8.

1053.1(7) *Role of complainant.* The role of the complainant in the disciplinary process is limited to providing the board with factual information relative to the complaint. A complainant is not party to any disciplinary proceeding that the board may initiate based in whole or in part on information provided by the complainant.

1053.1(8) *Role of the board.* The board does not act as an arbiter of disputes between private parties, nor does the board initiate disciplinary proceedings to advance the private interest of any person or party. The role of the board in the disciplinary process is to protect the public by investigating complaints and initiating disciplinary proceedings in appropriate cases. The board possesses sole decision-making authority throughout the disciplinary process, including the authority to determine whether a case will be investigated, the manner of the investigation, whether a disciplinary proceeding will be initiated, and the appropriate licensee discipline to be imposed, if any.

[ARC 7672C, IAB 3/6/24, effective 4/10/24; Editorial change: IAC Supplement 6/24/26]

481—1053.2(542B) Ruling on the initial inquiry.

1053.2(1) *Dismissal.* If a determination is made by the board that a complaint is without grounds or merit, the complaint will be dismissed. A letter of explanation concerning the decision of the board will be sent to the respondent and the complainant.

1053.2(2) *Requirement of further inquiry.* If determination is made by the board to order further inquiry, the complaint and initial recommendations will be provided to the investigator(s) along with a statement specifying the information deemed necessary.

1053.2(3) *Acceptance of the case.* If a determination is made by the board to initiate disciplinary action, the board may enter into an informal settlement or recommend formal disciplinary proceedings. The board's rules regarding informal settlement are found in rule 481—506.35(17A,272C).

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 542B.21, 542B.22 and 272C.6.

[ARC 7672C, IAB 3/6/24, effective 4/10/24; Editorial change: IAC Supplement 6/24/26]

481—1053.3(10A,17A,272C,542B) Grounds for discipline. The board has authority pursuant to Iowa Code chapters 10A, 542B, 17A and 272C to impose discipline for violations of those chapters and the rules promulgated thereunder and may initiate disciplinary action against a licensee holding an active, inactive or lapsed license on any of the grounds identified in Iowa Code section 542B.21.

1053.3(1) Fraud or deceit in procuring or attempting to procure an initial, comity, renewal, or reinstated license includes any intentional perversion of or reckless disregard for the truth when an application, or information in support of another's application, is submitted to the board, including:

a. False representation of a material fact, whether by word or by conduct, by false or misleading allegation, or by concealment of that which should have been disclosed.

b. Attempting to file or filing with the board any false or forged record or document, such as a college transcript, diploma or degree, examination report, verification of licensure, or continuing education certificate.

c. Reporting information, such as satisfaction of continuing education, in a false manner, through overt deceit, or with reckless disregard for the truth or accuracy of the information asserted.

d. Otherwise participating in any form of fraud or misrepresentation by act or omission.

1053.3(2) Professional incompetence includes, but is not limited to:

a. A substantial lack of knowledge or ability to discharge professional obligations within the practice of engineering or land surveying.

b. A substantial deviation from the standards of learning or skill ordinarily possessed and applied by other practitioners in the state of Iowa acting in the same or similar circumstances.

c. A failure to exercise the degree of care that is ordinarily exercised by the average practitioner acting in the same or similar circumstances.

d. Failure to conform to the minimum standards of acceptable and prevailing practice of engineering or land surveying in this state, including the land surveying standards set forth in Iowa Code chapters 354 and 355 and 481—Chapters 1055 and 1056.

e. Engaging in engineering or land surveying practices that are outside the technical competence of the licensee without taking reasonable steps to associate with a competent licensee or other steps to ensure competent practice.

f. Any other act or omission that demonstrates an inability to safely practice in a manner protective of the public's interest, including acts or omissions described in rule 481—1052.3(542B).

1053.3(3) Deceptive practices include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. Knowingly making misleading, deceptive, untrue or fraudulent representations in the practice of engineering or land surveying.

b. Use of untruthful or improbable statements in advertisements. Use of untruthful or improbable statements in advertisements includes, but is not limited to, an action by a licensee in making information or intention known to the public that is false, deceptive, misleading or promoted through fraud or misrepresentation.

c. Acceptance of any fee by fraud or misrepresentation.

d. Falsification of business or client records.

e. Submission of false or misleading reports or information to the board, including information supplied in an audit of continuing education or as a condition of probation or in a reference submitted for an examination or a license applicant or in any reports identified in this rule or rule 481—1052.3(542B).

f. Knowingly presenting as one's own the license, signature, or seal of another or of a fictitious licensee, or otherwise falsely impersonating a person holding an engineering or land surveying license.

g. Representing oneself as a professional engineer or professional land surveyor after the license has been suspended, revoked, surrendered, or placed on inactive status or has lapsed.

h. Fraud in representations as to skill or ability.

i. Any violation of Iowa Code section 542B.16 or associated rules in 481—Chapter 1050 involving a licensee's seal or certificate.

1053.3(4) Behaviors and conduct that are unethical or harmful or detrimental to the public include, but are not limited to, the following actions:

a. A violation of the code of professional conduct in 481—Chapter 1052.

b. Verbal or physical abuse, or improper sexual contact, if such behavior occurs within the practice of engineering or land surveying or if such behavior otherwise provides a reasonable basis for the board to conclude that such behavior could occur within such practice and, if so, would place the public at risk.

c. Aiding or abetting a violation of a provision of Iowa Code section 542B.27(1).

1053.3(5) Lack of proper qualifications, as provided in Iowa Code section 272C.3(2)“*b*,” includes but is not limited to:

a. Continuing to practice as an engineer or land surveyor without satisfying the continuing education required for license renewal.

b. Violation of Iowa Code section 542B.21(4) that adversely affects the licensee's ability to practice in a safe and competent manner.

1053.3(6) Professional misconduct, which includes, but is not limited to, revocation, suspension, or other disciplinary action taken against a licensee by a licensing authority of this state or another state, territory, or country. “Disciplinary action” includes a voluntary surrender of a license to resolve a pending disciplinary investigation or proceeding. A stay by an appellate court does not negate this requirement; however, if such disciplinary action is overturned or reversed by a court of last resort, discipline by the board based solely on such action shall be vacated. A licensee shall notify the board of such disciplinary action within 30 days of the disciplinary action.

1053.3(7) Willful or repeated violations include the willful or repeated violation or disregard of any provision of Iowa Code chapter 272C or 542B or any administrative rule adopted by the board in the administration or enforcement of such chapters.

1053.3(8) Conviction of felony includes the conviction of a felony under the laws of the United States, of any state or possession of the United States, or of any other country. The board will vacate any discipline based solely on a conviction, if that conviction is overturned or reversed by a court of last resort.

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481—1053.4(542B) Disciplinary findings and sanctions. The board's decision may include one or more of the following findings or sanctions:

1. Exoneration of respondent.
2. Revocation of license.
3. Suspension of license until further order of the board or for a specified period.
4. Nonrenewal of license.
5. Prohibition, until further order of the board or for a specific period, of engaging in specified procedures, methods or acts.
6. Probation.
7. Requirement of additional education or training.
8. Requirement of reexamination.
9. Issuance of a reprimand.
10. Imposition of civil penalties.
11. Issuance of citation and warning.
12. Desk review.
13. Other sanctions allowed by law as may be appropriate.

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481—1053.5(272C) Civil penalties. In addition to other disciplinary options, the board may assess civil penalties of up to \$1,000 per violation against licensees who violate any provision of rule 481—1053.3(10A,17A,272C,542B). Factors the board may consider when determining whether and in what amount to assess civil penalties include:

1. Whether other forms of discipline are being imposed for the same violation.
2. Whether the amount imposed will be a substantial economic deterrent to the violation.
3. The circumstances leading to the violation.
4. The severity of the violation and the risk of harm to the public.
5. The economic benefits gained by the licensee as a result of the violation.
6. The interest of the public.
7. Evidence of reform or remedial action.
8. Time elapsed since the violation occurred.
9. Whether the violation is a repeat offense following a prior cautionary letter, disciplinary order, or other notice of the nature of the infraction.
10. The clarity of the issue involved.
11. Whether the violation was willful and intentional.
12. Whether the licensee acted in bad faith.
13. The extent to which the licensee cooperated with the board.
14. Whether the licensee practiced professional engineering or professional land surveying with a lapsed, inactive, suspended or revoked license.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 542B.22.

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481—1053.6(542B) Publication of decisions. In addition to publication requirements found at 481—subrule 506.31, the following notifications shall be issued:

1. Following suspension of a professional land surveyor's license, notification must be issued to the county recorders and county auditors of the county of residence and immediately adjacent counties in Iowa.
2. Following revocation of a professional land surveyor's license, notification must be mailed to all county auditors in Iowa and the county recorders in the county of residence and immediately adjacent counties in Iowa.
3. Following the suspension or revocation of the license of a professional engineer or professional land surveyor, notification is issued to other boards of examiners for engineers and land surveyors under the jurisdiction of the government of the United States. This notification may be made through the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying or other national organizations recognized by the

board. In addition, if the licensee is known to be registered in another nation in North America, the appropriate board(s) are notified of the action.

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481—1053.7(542B) Disputes between licensees and clients. Reports from the insurance commissioner or other agencies on the results of judgments or settlements of disputes arising from malpractice claims or other actions between professional engineers or professional land surveyors and their clients may be referred to counsel or peer review committee. The counsel or peer review committee will investigate the report for violation of the statutes or rules governing the practice or conduct of the licensee. The counsel or peer review committee will advise the board of any probable violations or any further action required or recommend dismissal from further consideration.

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481—1053.8(272C,542B) Confidentiality of complaint and investigative information.

1053.8(1) General provisions. All complaint and investigative information received or created by the board is privileged and confidential pursuant to Iowa Code section 272C.6(4). Such information shall not be released to any person except as provided in that section.

1053.8(2) Disclosure to the subject of the investigation.

a. Legal authority. Pursuant to Iowa Code section 10A.506(9), the board may supply to a licensee who is the subject of a disciplinary complaint or investigation, prior to the initiation of a disciplinary proceeding, all or such parts of a disciplinary complaint, disciplinary or investigatory file, report, or other information as the board in its sole discretion believes would aid the investigation or resolution of the matter.

b. General rule. As a matter of general policy, the board will not disclose confidential complaint and investigative information to a licensee except as permitted by Iowa Code section 272C.6(4). Disclosure of a complainant's identity in advance of the filing of formal disciplinary charges, for instance, may adversely affect a complainant's willingness to file a complaint with the board.

c. Exceptions to general rule. The board may exercise its discretion to release information to a licensee that would otherwise be confidential under Iowa Code section 272C.6(4) under narrow circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

(1) Following a board determination that probable cause exists to file disciplinary charges against a licensee and prior to the issuance of the notice of hearing, the board may provide the licensee with a peer review or investigative report or expert opinions as reasonably needed for the licensee to assess the merits of a settlement proposal.

(2) The board may release to a licensee who is the subject of a board-initiated investigation, including those initiated following the board's receipt of an anonymous complaint, such records or information as may aid the investigation or resolution of the matter.

(3) The board may release information from a peer review or consultant's report when soliciting the licensee's position will aid in making the probable cause determination and such disclosure can be made to the licensee without revealing identifying information regarding the complainant, peer reviewer or consultant.

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These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code chapter 17A and sections 542B.2, 542B.22, and 272C.6.

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