

Framework for Fitness to Practice – Professional Standards

What are professional standards?

Professional Standards are based on the values, priorities, and practice of all self-regulated professions. In the practice of Agrology, standards describe the minimal levels of performance against which actual performance can be measured. Professional standards are intended to guide the daily practice of each and every designated professional. It is acknowledged that the majority of designated professional Agrologists will strive to exceed the requirements of these standards; however, a benchmark that provides criteria to determine levels below which performance is unacceptable is necessary to ensure public accountability, as well as professional and ethical practice.

The Ontario Institute of Agrologists requires designated practicing Agrologists to protect:

- individuals from harm of injury, illness, death
- the environment from harm so that it can be sustainable, and
- businesses from harm of advice or recommendations that result in insolvency or lack of competitiveness

What sets a designated practicing Agrologist apart from an individual that practices without a professional designation is adherence to professional standards, public accountability, and ethical practice.

Why do we need professional standards?

Professional standards, as previously noted, represent a minimal level of performance that the profession uses to evaluate the activities of its designated registrants. Professional standards in Agrology are developed to:

- Ensure the public of safe and ethical practices
- Act as a guide to the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to practice Agrology
- Ensure that Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists, Articling Agrologists and others [clients, businesses, industries, employers] can evaluate and measure the conduct of practice and competencies of designated practitioners against a transparent standard
- Enable Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists to improve their practice
- Promote the role and accountability of Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists to the public, other professionals, and themselves
- Act as a legal reference to describe reasonable and prudent practice in employment situations and complaints about a registered Professional Agrologist, Technical Agrologist or Articling Agrologist when presented to the professional body or a Court of Law



Why develop continuing competence standards for Registered Agrologists?

Registered Agrologists practice in an environment that is constantly changing in terms of knowledge requirements, legislative change, expectations, and evolving technologies. It is critical that Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists continue to develop knowledge and competence throughout their careers.

Protecting public interest and ensuring the quality of services offered is the responsibility of the Professional Agrologist, Technical Agrologist and Articling Agrologist. The public has a right to expect that designated Agrologists demonstrate continuing competence throughout their careers. Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists are accountable to the public. This means that they must:

- Practice within professional, legal, ethical, and competent standards, and
- Monitor practice according to those standards, and
- Be accountable for the consequences of non-compliance with professional standards

Continuing Competence Standards

What is the purpose and goals of continuing competency requirements?

Continuing competency requirements are designed to promote ongoing safe, ethical and competent practice by designated Agrologists to ensure that professionals are prepared to protect public interest and to pursue and achieve professional growth throughout their careers.

The goals of continuing competence requirements are the following:

- To provide safe practice as per the code of ethics and the standards of practice for designated professional Agrologists
- To facilitate development for Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists where areas for improvement for the agrologist or where areas for risk to the public exist or potentially exist
- To support Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists and Articling Agrologists in their professional commitment to lifelong learning and excellence
- To support quality practice by registered Agrologists in Ontario and if they choose to practice in other Canadian Provinces, have the competency to do so
- To increase the public's confidence in the profession of Agrology through those practicing with excellence, and with their professional designation.

Definitions

Competence: the ability of a Professional Agrologist, Technical Agrologist or Articling Agrologist to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment, and personal attributes required to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.

Continuing competence: the ongoing ability of a Professional Agrologist, Technical Agrologist or Articling Agrologist to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment, and personal attributes required to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting. Maintaining this ongoing ability involves a continual

process linking the code of ethics, standards of practice, and life-long learning. The Professional Agrologist, Technical Agrologist or Articling Agrologist reflects on his/her practice on an ongoing basis and takes action to continually improve that practice.

Continuing Competence Requirements: Such requirements focus on promoting the maintenance and acquirement of competence of Professional Agrologists, Technical Agrologists or Articling Agrologists throughout their careers. Commitment to continuous learning and continuing education to meet client/customer and employer needs, as well as meet public competency and ethical practice expectations, is the hallmark of those who have their professional Agrologist designation in Ontario. The OIA promotes involvement of registered Agrologists in continuing education programs, as deemed suitable to the individual's needs, learning styles, and practice requirements.

Components of Continuing Competency Standards

The Ontario Institute of Agrologists' Code of Ethics and Fitness to Practice – Professional Standards provide the basis for the practice of designated professional Agrologists in Ontario.

Code of Ethics

The Profession of Agrology demands **integrity, competence, and objectivity** in the conduct of its Registrants while fulfilling their professional responsibilities to the Public, the Employer or Client, the Profession, and other Agrologists.

Professional Standards – Essential Competencies

Are derived from the Code of Ethics and broadly define the minimum expectations for those registered as Professional Agrologists (P.Ag.), Technical Agrologists (T.Ag.) or Articling Agrologists (A.Ag.)

- **Integrity**
 - Act towards other Agrologists with courtesy and good faith.
 - Respects and utilizes social diversity.
 - Facilitates professionals' understanding of their value in protecting public interest.
 - Understands profession's governance and operational structure and functions.
 - Utilizes professional principles, and performance management systems and methods.

- **Competency in area of practice**
 - Demonstrates knowledge of developments in area of practice relevant to any services that are undertaken.
 - Monitors markets/clients; adapts business as appropriate.
 - Demonstrates community and environmental sensitivity.
 - Demonstrates ownership towards profession and declared scope of practice.
 - Communicates direction, priorities and decisions; articulates intent.

- **Objectivity**

- Act fairly to colleagues, client's associates, employers, subordinates and employees.
- Recognizes and addresses implications of situation/issue.

Monitoring Compliance

The Registrar is responsible for maintaining a Register and establishing the record-keeping and monitoring protocols and tools for the use of registered Agrologists to record professional development, continuous learning and competency enhancement. The Registrar will conduct audits in order to monitor and maintain compliance of designated Agrologists. Designated professional Agrologists are required to maintain these record-keeping logs.

Designated Agrologists are expected to maintain professional development records on an on-going basis as a means of verification of continued competency. Registered Agrologists are notified that their PD Log is under audit and have one month to provide the Registrar with the supportive documentation to reconcile their PD Log submission. The Registrar is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, and maintaining compliance in terms of professional development logs.

Agrologists are required to keep records and documents of proof for a minimum of seven years. This documentation may be required in such instances as peer reviews or complaint investigations.

Continuing Competency activity reporting is required for the preceding year within one month of the end of the year (January 31st for the preceding year). The completion and maintenance of these records is the responsibility of the Registered Agrologist.

It should be noted that failure to maintain appropriate records under this component may be considered an act of professional misconduct and may lead to disciplinary action and even the revoking of ones professional Agrologist designation.

Regulating Non-Compliance

Monitoring of compliance can be regulated by:

- Linking continuing competence requirements with the registration of a practitioner. This provides one means of monitoring compliance and ensuring that practitioners are participating in activities to continually maintain and acquire competence/knowledge.
- Competence and Fitness to Practice assessments, limited to an annual random sample or target group.
- Linking continuing competence participation to registration helps to assure the public, employers, and the regulatory body itself that registered Agrologists possess the necessary competencies to practice Agrology.
- Auditing will be utilized by the Registrar as a more in-depth method of ensuring practitioner compliance with continuing competence requirements such as a

review of documentation, provision of information, or a more detailed examination of the practitioner's practice, and/or structured interviews with the registered Agriologist and if requested by the employer, the employer.

Non-compliance may result in conditional, suspended, or revoked registration.

Adapted from:

- A National Framework for Continuing Competence Programs for Registered Nurses (September 2000). http://www.cna-nurses.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/National_Framework_Continuing_Competence_e.pdf.
- Continuing Education Guidelines (2004). The Ontario Professional Foresters Association.
- Professional Standards for Dietitians in Canada (2000). Dietitians of Canada.
- Quality Assurance Program (2006). Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. www.rcdso.org.
- Registered Nurse Continuing Competence Program Workbook (December 2004). Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association.
- Resources of the National Continuing Competence Conferences for Regulated Professions.
- Best Practices of Ontario Regulators Policy Network and Ontario Regulators for Access Consortium.
- Policy and Procedure revisions as approved by the OIA Board of Directors.