Online Resource for Ethical Dilemmas

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The Online Ethics Center for Science and Engineering is a practical resource for helping to solve problems encountered by engineers facing ethical dilemmas.

The Online Ethics Center, located at "http://www.onlineethics.org", was established in 1995 and is funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation. Among its resources are educational support for the classroom, essays on ethics, and descriptions of leaders in science and engineering. Others that may be useful include the Onlineethics Help-line and the "Solving Problems" module, with essays describing typical problems faced by engineers and techniques for addressing them.

The Solving Problems section presents ethical quandaries — many based on actual incidents — followed by expert commentary. These involve a protagonist seeking to do the right thing and a specialist providing techniques on how to address the issue. Scenarios range from the general — sexual harassment — to the more specific, such as laboratory safety and ethics of reverse engineering.

For situations not covered by the Solving Problems module, questions may be posed to the Onlineethics Helpline at "helpln@onlineethics.org", sponsored by the Online Ethics Center and the U.S. National Institute for Engineering Ethics. The staff of knowledgeable persons, including IEEE members, assists engineers and scientists in maintaining high ethical standards when meeting difficult situations.

Messages sent to the help-line are routed to a help-line respondent who seeks to answer them within three days. Every effort is made to respect confidentiality. The help-line does not provide legal advice, nor does it have resources to launch investigations of possible misdeeds. What it can do is assist in guiding engineers in trouble to act wisely and direct them to appropriate venues for further help.