

# An ethics hotline

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Chair, IEEE Ethics Committee

**T**his column of THE INSTITUTE provides you, the member, with information on the activities of the IEEE Ethics Committee and explores issues that have come before the committee. It is my distinct pleasure to announce here the initiation of the IEEE Ethics Committee Information Line, also known as the Ethics Hotline. This service, which will provide ethical support to the membership and the profession, will be available as of Aug. 12.

The hotline initiative is the first support activity of the Ethics Committee since it became Institute-wide in its scope. The purpose of the program is to respond quickly to individuals seeking information regarding ethics-related issues. Currently the access is via phone (tel: 1-908-562-6590) or e-mail ("ethics@iee.org"), with the request, if appropriate, being referred to someone with expertise in the particular area. It should be noted that it is not the intent of the service to tell the requester what to do, but rather to supply information

regarding the issues that are involved and to explore options and opportunities. In this way the Ethics Committee hopes to make it easier for our members and colleagues to practice our profession ethically, even when this may lead to conflicts.

**PRIVACY PROTECTED.** Within the general principles under which the program will operate, the privacy of the requesters will be paramount. Nothing will be done that might cause harm to the requester, or that contravenes the expressed wishes of the requester.

Initial contact with the service will be with a member of the IEEE staff, who will handle routine matters, such as requests for a copy of the Code of Ethics or for general information. At this point, if appropriate, the requester may be advised that the request would be more appropriate for some other office, and the appropriate referral will be made.

When the request is more complex, contact information will be obtained from the requester and the information will be referred to a member of the Ethics Committee, who will



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make contact as soon as is possible. The committee member will then work with the requester to supply the necessary support information. Where appropriate, other resources, including other members of the IEEE, may be called upon for assistance.

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED.** I trust that you, as the need arises, will take advantage of the Ethics Information Line. At the same time, I would like to encourage those of you with an interest to volunteer to assist the Ethics Committee in providing the best information that is available. Anyone with an interest or experience in ethics issues is encouraged to contact me to explore ways in which you can contribute your expertise. Please provide me with contact information and a description of areas where you can provide assistance. As appropriate, members of the committee will be in touch with you to explore ways in which you may be involved with the project.

Any comments you might have about this initiative or suggestions for additional activities for the Ethics Committee are always welcome.

*Send suggestions or comments for the Ethics Committee to Cathy Downer, IEEE Ethics Committee, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ, USA 08855-1331; e-mail: "ethics@ieee.org".*