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State proposes revoking credentials for City of Portland employee who reviews building plans

(Salem) – The Oregon Building Codes Division (BCD) issued a proposed order to revoke state-issued credentials for Marcia Karr, a senior building plans examiner employed by the City of Portland. State investigators determined Karr failed to act in the public’s interest by promoting the sale of commercial building software that she helped to develop and received compensation for while working with city building department customers. BCD is also proposing civil penalties of \$6,000.

Karr is employed by the city’s Bureau of Development Services as a plans examiner and inspector. In her job, Karr examines building plans and other documents submitted by architects, builders, and contractors to ensure building code compliance.

In early 2016, state investigators learned that Karr promoted and endorsed “calculations” software she helped develop in 2015 to various contractors and individuals both verbally and via her city email account while working as a city employee during business hours. Karr’s software is available for sale and download via a website.

The BCD investigation found that the software was purchased by at least six companies – a few of which learned about the software from Karr while meeting with her to discuss building documents being reviewed by the city for approval. The companies used Karr’s software to generate required calculations needed to demonstrate the mechanical system met the requirements of the state building code.

Certified building officials, inspectors, and plans examiners employed by a city or county in Oregon are required by state law to maintain a degree of professionalism while performing their building department duties. State law allows BCD to revoke credentials for inspectors or plans examiners who perform code inspection or plan review on a building structure in which they have a business affiliation or financial interest.

“Individuals must work in the public’s best interest – not in their own personal or financial interest – when performing plan reviews or inspections on construction projects in Oregon,” said Building Codes Division Administrator Mark Long. “The building code must be applied consistently and fairly by inspectors and plan examiners without personal bias or potential for personal financial gain.”

Karr has 20 days to appeal the state’s findings and recommended revocation of her credentials.

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The Building Codes Division (BCD) adopts the statewide construction standards, which ensure a uniform and predictable regulatory environment in Oregon. For more information, visit www.bcd.oregon.gov.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services is Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbs.oregon.gov.