



COMPLAINTS PROCESS – A PUBLIC INFORMATION GUIDE

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Version Summary Table

Version	Responsible Party	Publish Date	Summary of Changes
1	Complaints Committee	January 2026	First publishing approved by Council on November 20, 2025

Introduction

This guide is intended for general information purposes only. For full details, refer to the Complaints and Discipline Regulation ([O. Reg. 258/02](#)). If there is a conflict between this guide and the Regulation, the Regulation will apply.

PGO holds the legislated responsibilities under the *Professional Geoscientists Act, 2000*, to govern, in the interest of protecting public safety, welfare and health and in the interests of maintaining high professional standards, the people and entities who practice professional geoscience.

The Complaints Committee of PGO may consider and investigate the conduct of a registrant or certificate of authorization holder. The primary function of the Complaints Committee is to investigate the circumstances relating to a complaint, and to determine:

1. If the complaint is serious enough to warrant a referral to discipline;
2. If so, whether there is a reasonable prospect of proving the allegations; and
3. If the answer to either of the first two questions is no, whether educational or remedial action is appropriate in the circumstances, or whether the complaint should be dismissed.

Individuals who may be involved in a complaint and their roles

The Complainant is the individual who initiated the complaint. This individual is not a party to the complaint, and will not receive updates regarding the complaint status. They will be contacted should any further information be required, or when a decision has been made.

The Respondent is the Registrant or Certificate of Authorization holder that the complaint has been submitted against.

The Registrar is responsible for maintaining the official files of the Complaints Committee, and is the first point of contact for a complainant. The Registrar facilitates meetings of the panel assigned to review the complaint, contacts appropriate parties as directed by the panel, and assists with writing the decision letters. **The Registrar does not make decisions.**

The Chair of the Complaints Committee is responsible for canvassing the committee in order to find members who are available to sit on a review panel. They will conduct a conflict of interest check on panel members before confirming the committee member's position on a panel.

The Preliminary Review Panel (PRP) are the individuals from the complaints committee who are assigned to review the complaint materials. A panel may consist of one member, or three members, depending on the complexity of the case.

In some cases, an investigator may be appointed by the panel. This individual is usually from an independent third-party firm of investigators, who may be retained if the circumstances of the complaint are such that an outside investigator would be beneficial, for example, in collecting documents, or reviewing large volumes of data.

In some cases, an expert witness may be retained to review certain technical information. This would be an individual who is an expert in the area in question, and that has no conflict with the registrant, certificate of authorization holder, or complainant involved in the complaint.

In more complex cases, legal counsel may be retained to provide advice to the review panel. In the event that the complaint is referred to the discipline committee, they would act as the prosecutor for PGO.

Conflict of Interest

The Chair of the Complaints Committee is responsible for ensuring that panel members do not have a conflict of interest or an appearance of bias with any of the parties involved in the case. A conflict of interest or appearance of bias can take many forms, including, but not limited to:

1. A connection or relationship with one of the participants in the events or a witness;
2. An interest in the outcome of the complaint (e.g. the respondent (registrant or certificate of authorization holder) is a competitor);
3. Any financial interest in the matter (e.g. a committee member's financial investments could be affected); or
4. Behaviour or remarks that indicate an appearance of bias.

Where there is any possibility of there being a conflict of interest or an appearance of bias, the committee member will discuss the matter with the Chair of the committee. The Registrar and legal counsel can be brought into the discussions if necessary. Where there is a conflict of interest or an appearance of bias, the committee member will declare it, leave the room and participate no further in the matters.

Committee members who are assigned a complaint as part of a review panel will be asked to sign a conflict of interest and bias declaration at the start of each new complaint, and the signed form will be retained in the files by PGO.

Jurisdiction

The Complaints Committee has jurisdiction over PGO registrants and certificate of authorization holders. This includes practising professional geoscientists, limited practising professional geoscientists, and temporary practising professional geoscientists. PGO does not have jurisdiction over geoscientists-in-training, or any other individual who is not registered with PGO.

Confidentiality

Matters of complaints under review, evidence, and information gathered by the Preliminary Review Panel are confidential to the panel member(s) and the Complaints Committee Chair, except to the extent necessary to carry out a review, or through other means of resolving the complaint. **If there is a referral to the Discipline Committee, the process then becomes public.**

All correspondence and communication between the complainant or the respondent and the Preliminary Review Panel and/or the Complaints Committee will be made through the Registrar.

Complaints Procedure

Initial stages

There are several steps involved in the processing of a complaint. Each case is different, but all will follow the same procedure. The steps are outlined below:

1. Registrar receives complaint form from the complainant, including any accompanying documentation relevant to the complaint.
2. The Registrar reviews the information and determines the nature of the complaint. If the nature of the complaint is not clear, the Registrar may contact the complainant for clarification.
3. Once the nature of the complaint has been determined, the Registrar prepares an acknowledgement of complaint letter for the complainant, and a notice of complaint letter for the respondent (registrant or certificate of authorization holder). The letter to the respondent includes the complaint form and any accompanying documentation that was submitted by the complainant.
4. The respondent is given 30 days to prepare a response to the complaint. In certain circumstances, the respondent can request an extension to this date, for example, if they retain legal counsel and need extra time to prepare the response.
5. During this time, the Chair of the Complaints Committee will begin to canvas the committee for available members to sit on the Preliminary review Panel.
6. Once a panel has been assembled, the Registrar will canvas the panel for a date for the first meeting, to occur following the 30 day respondent response period, and which will allow enough time for the panel to review all materials. All documentation and correspondence from both the complainant and respondent are sent to the Preliminary Review Panel before the first meeting of the panel.

When submitting a complaint:

- Ensure that the complaint is specific, focused, and relevant to the practice of professional geoscience.
- Provide as much supporting documentation as possible.

The Preliminary Review Panel

The role of the Preliminary Review Panel (PRP) is to ensure that an adequate review is conducted. Often, the communications with the complainant and respondent will provide sufficient information. In some circumstances, an investigator may be appointed by the panel to collect information.

On reviewing the complaint, the preliminary review panel may:

1. Dismiss the complaint;
2. Request clarification or further information from the complainant or the respondent;
3. Appoint an investigator;
4. Direct that the complainant and respondent participate in complaint settlement;
5. Refer the complaint, in whole or in part, to the discipline committee;
6. Take such other action as it considers appropriate in the circumstances.

If the preliminary review panel makes the decision to dismiss the complaint, a notice of intention to dismiss is prepared, along with the reasons for the intention to dismiss, and is sent to the complainant and the respondent. Those in receipt of a notice of intention to dismiss may make further submissions within 30 days of the date of the notice. If no submissions are received, the complaint will be dismissed. If submissions are received, a new preliminary review panel of three members of the complaints committee is formed. The new panel will review all documentation and make their determination, in any one of the ways listed above. If the new panel makes the decision to dismiss the complaint, a notice to that effect will be provided to the complainant and respondent.

A request may be issued to obtain additional information from the respondent, complainant, or other party. If a request is made, the individual in question will be asked to respond within 30 days. Any further information provided by the complainant will be sent to the respondent for a further response.

If the subject of the complaint is considered to be complex and/or serious, an investigator may be appointed. An investigator will carry out their duties, as requested by the preliminary review panel, including interviewing the complainant and respondent, and gathering any information relevant to the complaint. The investigator will then prepare a report to be presented to the preliminary review panel summarizing their findings, and including all statements and documents obtained. The investigator does not make decisions; the investigator's role is to collect and provide factual evidence.

In some circumstances, the panel may find that it is appropriate to designate an individual to act as a mediator to try to resolve the complaint, and invite the complainant and respondent to participate in settlement efforts.

If the preliminary review panel concludes that, based on the information it has gathered and reviewed, the allegations warrant a referral to discipline, and that there is a reasonable prospect that the allegations can be proven, the complaint will be referred to

the discipline committee. A referral to discipline can only be made by the preliminary review panel. Even if the respondent admits to unprofessional conduct (professional misconduct) or unskilled practice (negligence or incompetence), the complaint will still be referred to a panel for consideration. A referral to discipline is done by submitting a statement of allegations to the complainant, respondent and to the discipline committee. Reasons for the decision are not provided in this case as the matter is considered to be still in process and any reasons can bias the discipline committee.

The preliminary review panel may take other action if they determine that none of the above are relevant to the severity and complexity of the complaint. There are no guidelines for what is considered an appropriate action, as they are not defined in the Regulation. Some options for what may be considered appropriate action are as follows:

- Issuing a written letter of advice or caution;
- Inviting the respondent to receive verbal advice or caution (only after the respondent agrees to attend, if they refuse, the panel can consider other options);
- Negotiate a voluntary undertaking with the respondent for such things as:
 - Changing policies and procedures
 - Agreeing not to do certain things in the future, such as sign NI 43-101 reports
 - Agreeing to do certain things in the future
 - Agreeing to successfully complete specified educational activities approved by the Registrar
 - Agreeing to participate in and successfully complete a specified mentoring program
 - Agreeing to undertake a specified course of medical treatment (e.g. for a substance abuse disorder)
 - Agreeing that certain information should be posted on the PGO public register
- Voluntarily surrendering their registration or Certificate of Authorization, with or without an undertaking never to reapply.

Timelines

PGO endeavors to process complaints in a timely manner, however, depending on the complexity of a complaint, timelines can vary. Any time further information is requested, the individual is given 30 days to respond. If further information is requested from the complainant, a further 30 days are allotted to the respondent to prepare their response. If a complaint is dismissed, the process can take only two or three months. In a more complex complaint where investigators are appointed, it can take over a year for a decision to be made. If a complaint is referred to the discipline committee, it can take substantially longer for a hearing to occur, as this process involves at least one pre-hearing conference before a hearing date can be agreed upon. PGO would like to remind those who submit complaints that the preliminary review panel of the complaints committee is comprised of volunteers, and it can take time for them to review all complaint materials and schedule meetings due to work and personal commitments.