When the new Rules of Professional Conduct went into effect at the beginning of this year a significant project remained: updating the Oregon State Bar’s library of ethics opinions to incorporate the new rules. The OSB has now completed that project. The new ethics opinions have been approved by the OSB’s Board of Governors and are now available on its web site at www.osbar.org.

In updating the opinions, the OSB took a very practical approach. It kept the same order as the old set and simply plugged in the new rules and made any appropriate additional changes. In other words, if you are looking for old opinion 1991-1, an updated opinion on the same subject is now available in opinion 2005-1. Under RPC 8.6, opinions approved by the OSB’s Board of Governors are called “formal” opinions and those issued by the OSB’s Legal Ethics Committee and its General Counsel’s Office are called “informal” opinions. In this column, we’ll look at some of the primary formal opinions in four areas: conflicts, confidentiality, the no contact with represented parties rule and fee agreements.

**Conflicts.** Current client conflicts under RPC 1.7 are summarized generally in Formal Opinion 2005-158 and applied using the context of a civil
automobile accident case. 2005-158 provides both a useful example and an analytical framework for deciding whether conflicts exist involving multiple current clients. Formal Opinion 2005-82 plays a similar role in the criminal law context. Formal Opinions 2005-11, 2005-17 and 2005-174, in turn, do the same for former client conflicts under RPC 1.9. When read in concert, these three opinions offer practical advice on parsing former client conflicts arising from both the similarity of matters and the potential need to use a former client’s confidential information. Formal Opinions 2005-85 and 2005-122 give guidance on two related areas. 2005-85 deals with an important question that is often a predicate to analyzing conflicts: who is the client in a particular circumstance. 2005-122 discusses the situations in which advance waivers of future conflicts may be appropriate.

Confidentiality. Formal Opinions 2005-23, 2005-110 and 2005-136 all contain general summaries of the confidentiality rule, RPC 1.6. Although each of these opinions is built around a different factual context, they all contain useful summaries of the confidentiality rule along with citations to other related ethics opinions and case law. Several of the exceptions to the confidentiality rule, in turn, are examined in separate opinions: 2005-34 (client perjury); 2005-104 (self-defense); 2005-105 (client criminal activity); and 2005-136 (litigation between the lawyer and the client).

Contacts with Represented Parties. Formal Opinions 2005-6 and 2005-147 outline generally RPC 4.2’s “no contact with represented parties” rule.
Formal Opinions 2005-80 and 2005-152, in turn, apply RPC 4.2 in the corporate and governmental context by delineating who is, and is not, a represented party for purposes of the rule.


Even within these four areas, the opinions cited here are not exhaustive lists. They illustrate, however, the depth of resources available to lawyers facing questions in these and other areas. There are also search engines on the OSB’s web site and in the Casemaker library to help navigate through the 175 formal opinions adopted by the OSB.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mark J. Fucile of Fucile & Reising LLP focuses on legal ethics, product liability defense and condemnation litigation. In his legal ethics practice, Mark handles professional responsibility, regulatory and attorney-client privilege
matters and law firm related litigation for lawyers, law firms and legal
departments throughout the Northwest. He is a past member of the Oregon
State Bar’s Legal Ethics Committee, is a past chair of the Washington State Bar
Rules of Professional Conduct Committee, is a member of the Idaho State Bar
Professionalism & Ethics Section and is a co-editor of the OSB’s Ethical Oregon
Lawyer and the WSBA’s Legal Ethics Deskbook. Mark also writes the monthly
Ethics Focus column for the Multnomah (Portland) Bar’s Multnomah Lawyer, the
quarterly Ethics & the Law column for the WSBA Bar News and is a regular
contributor on risk management to the OSB Bar Bulletin, the Idaho State Bar
Advocate and the Alaska Bar Rag. Mark’s telephone and email are
503.224.4895 and Mark@frllp.com.