

WOOD AND FIBER

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WOOD, PAPER, TEXTILES, AND RUBBISH

The juxtaposition of the words in the title of this editorial did not come about by free association in my mind, but stems instead from the label on a Class A fire extinguisher. However, this seemingly coincidental grouping that includes the wood and fiber to which this journal is devoted may have a lesson for us relative to the perennial problems of SWST image and professional identification.

Rubbish is defined as "useless waste or rejected matter," synonymous with trash, which is "something worth little or nothing." Since the greatest part of municipal solid waste is cellulosic in origin, the association of wood and paper with rubbish has a real basis in fact and we should not be surprised that in most people's minds wood and paper are of low value and hence of low status. While the fire extinguisher label groups these materials with rubbish by reason of composition alone, there is unfortunately an association on the basis of value almost everywhere else.

The wood, paper, and textile industries have traditionally been technologically conservative and commodity-oriented. Cheap materials, marketed primarily for price and destined for early replacement, have not required the high level of sophisticated technology associated with chemicals, durable goods, electronics, and communications. Inevitably the public and self-image of scientists and technologists associated with low technology industries has suffered.

That this need not always be true has been shown by that segment of the textile industry involved in synthetic fibers. As we come to the end of the era of cheap energy, we will also be entering a period in which

hitherto low value materials such as wood and paper can no longer be equated with rubbish, but because of pressures generated by energy requirements, environmental considerations, and increasing population will become ever more valuable.

In addition, wood and wood fiber possess another attribute that will raise their value in the eyes of an energy and environmentally conscious society. With proper forest management, they are renewable.

Enhanced public appreciation of the value of wood and wood fiber will be reflected in a higher level of technology in their utilization, the attraction of more technical personnel to improve and apply this technology, and increased public and self-esteem for those involved in these activities.

This millenium for wood technologists and ultimately for SWST is not guaranteed, but its coming can be assisted by educational efforts that will change the public image of wood and fiber from rubbish to materials of value. While it may help our morale to exhort each other to build professional identification and stature, in the long run we can accomplish more by looking outward than by talking to a mirror.

I have been gratified to see increasing mention of the importance and value of wood and fiber products in the advertising and reports to stockholders of the forest products industries. Those of us in positions to do so should reinforce and expand this trend. In addition to highly technical reports directed at our fellow wood scientists and technologists, we should also be writing papers for our colleagues in other disciplines for publication in their journals and the general scientific press.

(Continued on page 245)

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Editorial

(Continued from page 239)

The opinion molders and leaders of tomorrow are in our universities today. How many of them spend four years on campus without even being aware of the research and teaching involving wood which is going on?

While we cannot and should not spend all our time as publicists, if we do not speak up for wood who will?

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