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CODE OF ETHICS

We, like some other professional societies, have a Code of Ethics. The canons are grouped into three categories: Relations with the Public, Relations with Employer or Clients, and Relations with Technical Associates. In 1992, a member charged another with violating the Code of Ethics and requested that the Society take appropriate action. I quickly discovered that we had no committee to which I could refer this matter and no process to use for resolution.

This was, apparently, the first time a member of the Society of Wood Science and Technology had challenged another member with violating the Code of Ethics.

I called the Society of American Foresters (SAF), discussed their Code of Ethics and process for resolving disputes, and received a copy of their Constitution. Although the Codes of both organizations are quite similar, the emphasis placed on them is quite different.

The first page of the SAF Constitution and Bylaws is their Code of Ethics. Furthermore, *ETHICS* is the title of Article VIII of their Constitution. We do not publish our Code of Ethics as part of our Constitution, nor is the Code referenced in it. The only mention of the Code of Ethics is in our Bylaws (Article VI, Section A.3), where we state that it is the responsibility of the Membership Committee to make the members aware of the Code.

The preamble of SAF's Code of Ethics states: "The purpose of these canons is to govern the professional conduct . . . provided in Article VIII of the Society's Constitution."

Ours is a document that is intended "to serve

as a guide for the conduct of its members and to give professional meaning to the term, Wood Technologist."

The Society of American Foresters requires members to abide by their Code as a condition of membership. We place no such restriction on membership. They publish their Code of Ethics annually in the *Journal of Forestry*. We do not publish our Code in *Wood and Fiber Science*.

The Society of American Foresters has an Ethics Committee and a clearly defined procedure for dealing with violators, which includes a description of the possible punishments if the violation is upheld. We have neither a committee nor a procedure.

The Society of American Foresters is a much larger organization than the Society of Wood Science and Technology. They typically have about one to three cases each year, and their single most common violation concerns conflict of interest (Canon #8).

I believe that it is good and necessary to have a Code of Ethics. It is obvious that there are significant differences between how societies view its importance. It is a fundamentally different message to tell members their professional behavior is *governed* by rather than *guided* by a Code of Ethics. It sends a different message when it is a condition of membership to abide by the Code.

Also, it is obvious that we may be called upon to mediate between individuals and to deal with disputes concerning violations of the Code of Ethics.

Do we need a change? Would we—as a so-

ciety, as individuals—behave differently if our policy were similar to SAF's?

Would we gain credibility or increased stature with the public, our employers, or our associates if we changed?

I would like to hear from you on this issue.

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President

Society of Wood Science and Technology