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YOU'VE GOT MAIL

One of the most beneficial tools I've used in my wood science work and play over the past five years is electronic mail or e-mail as it is referred to commonly. When e-mail first became available to me in 1994, I likened it to other technology fads like citizen band radios (remember those!) and 8-track tapes; and I begrudgingly used it as an impersonal way to communicate with my colleagues on the local network server (being a Mainer and prone to gossip, I still do prefer face-to-face "hall chat"). However, as the Information Superhighway became faster, easier to use, and e-mail programs added "bells and whistles" such as being able to send file attachments, I began to see the wisdom of the creators of this technology. All of a sudden, I was able to work on manuscripts and proposals with colleagues down the hall, across the nation, and overseas! What used to take weeks and sometimes months when collaborating with folks from far away on research or arranging academic exchanges can now be done almost simultaneously. Some projects that I am currently working on require the exclusive use of e-mail for all correspondence.

I had excellent success in using e-mail to take care of housing, registration, and visa details for international student exchanges in wood science when I was employed at Michigan Tech. We exchanged students with The Technical University in Zvolen, Slovakia, and KTH in Stockholm, Sweden. I have exchanged various manuscripts, data, and proposals with colleagues at Washington State University, Auburn University, the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory, the Southern Experiment Station in Pineville, Louisiana, NCASI, the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center, Port Hueneme, California, Southwest Forestry College, Kunming, China, KTH Royal Institute of

Technology, Stockholm, Sweden (are you bored, yet?), etc. As a caveat, big file attachments are better exchanged using file transfer protocol (FTP), which won't be covered here for the sake of my e-mail focus.

The anonymity of e-mail makes it easy to solicit information from colleagues working on similar research problems in other disciplines. For example, I'll read an interesting paper, and want to ask some questions. What do I do? I look up the author's e-mail address on his/her respective University Web Page, and write to ask (I think) thought-provoking questions about the research results. It is usually helpful to preface your questions with an introduction, but most authors are flattered to discuss their research work. I've also had junior high and high school students contact me with wood science questions, based on seeing my web page. You learn something. They learn something. The way it should be!

And how about those students who leave graduate school before they finish writing or making final editorial changes to their thesis or dissertation? E-mail makes it easy for students and major professors to keep in touch! One of my former Master's students who probably would like to remain anonymous is currently corresponding with me, and making the final changes to a thesis which was successfully defended in December 1995. This student plans to finish in May 1999. Hope springs eternal.

As I wrote this note, I received several e-mail messages that badly need attending to. By the way, the delete key is another beneficial tool!

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