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## THE THREAT OF ONE-DIMENSIONAL THINKING

For the past decade, ecology has been a major national concern. Drumbeaters have often been able to raise environmental issues as the last testaments by which all other matters must be assessed. A manifest of this is the frequent necessity—sometimes mandated—to prepare environmental impact statements for almost anything man wishes to do.

The hypnotic drumbeats still lure many to look neither to the left nor the right, but straight ahead at one issue. It is as if all but one dimension falls away and the advocate is insulated from the impacts of all other concerns. One-dimensional thinking has been characteristic of some environmental activists, but environmentalists have not had a monopoly on this mode of thought and action.

During the past several years, energy has competed with, and sometimes even replaced, the environment as a crisis issue. Energy and environment frequently stand horn-to-horn and often present two groups of conflicting priorities.

But what does this have to do with wood and wood products? How does this affect the wood scientist? The combination of the one-dimensional approach and the growth in the number and power of regulatory agencies can be a dangerous combination. The situation is potentially even more deadly with the realization that many of yesterday's one-dimensional thinkers are today's regulators.

The changing climate of regulated America could present to manufacturers of wood products and wood scientists challenges unlike any before. Questions are now being raised. Under the banner of fire safety, will various wood products be restricted from certain types of buildings because of flamespread or fire performance character-

istics? In the name of national health, will plywood and particleboard, products that can emit small quantities of formaldehyde that sometimes are detectable, be classified as containing toxic materials and thus be severely limited in their end use applications?

The climate has changed whether we like it or not. While it is appropriate to help the public focus on the narrow parochialism of the one-dimensional approach, this will not be enough. We will need to better identify and quantify the properties and emphasize the many desirable and even unique characteristics of our products.

Test methods are being developed and changed; end use criteria are being established; product improvements are being called for. Producers of various synthetics understand the physical and chemical properties of their products to a much better extent than we understand the same wood properties. The influence of manufacturers of synthetics could be proportionally greater than that of our industry in development of standards, use criteria, and property requirements.

In the past it was not thought necessary to support the manufacture and marketing of commodity wood products with even a moderate size research of technical resource base. It is time for reassessment. What was not necessary yesterday may be essential tomorrow. Retaining many of our traditional markets that are threatened by the potential results of one-dimensional thinking could well depend on our response to this challenge.

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