

# WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

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## THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Peer review is a fundamental part of scientific publications. *Wood and Fiber Science* has always used a form of the process that encouraged signed reviews, but always honored the reviewers' requests if they wished to be anonymous. While this process has worked reasonably well for over 38 years, it may have resulted in reluctance to give harsh criticisms or recommendations for rejecting certain articles.

The Executive Board of the Society of Wood Science and Technology at its June 2006 meeting in Newport Beach, CA, made a decision to start a "double blind" review process, meaning that the authors' names will not be revealed to the reviewers and, conversely, the reviewers' identities will not be revealed to the authors. This process is used by most of the highly regarded scientific publications, and it may further improve the scientific quality of papers published in *Wood and Fiber Science*.

While peer review has long been an essential part of science publications, it has raised some questions recently. Peer review is supposed to be a powerful control for approving quality of research published in journals and at conferences. However, it is largely an amateur process, say the critics. It is often poor at detecting errors; it is slow, and often unreliable. It is inefficient at picking up ethics problems or scientific fraud. All this is because peer review is a human process, an art rather than a science. From my point of view, as editor of *Wood and Fiber Science*, two reviewers agreeing on a paper is not much better than chance. It has been recommended recently that perhaps as many six reviews should be gathered for each scientific paper to ensure

quality. That, however, would not be reasonable for our journal, and it would further delay the already slow process.

Unfortunately, the whole process is geared toward assisting researchers to cope with the world of "publish or perish" policies created primarily by academia and funding agencies. Because of these policies, many of the authors and researchers are dissatisfied with the slow process, which creates undue publication delays. In the case of *Wood and Fiber Science*, such delays are increased even more by some of the reviewers' very slow response to the editor's requests. Some authors are occasionally concerned regarding the fairness of the peer review process and challenge the reviewers' criticism and recommendations. It is expected because again peer review is a human process. In cases like that, our procedure has long been to return the authors' challenges to the reviewers and try to mediate and arrive at some level of agreement.

*Wood and Fiber Science* has been noted as one of the premier scientific publications in the wood science and technology field. With the new review process, I expect that the quality of our journal will further improve and remain one of the main sources of new scientific information assisting professionals and scientists in the field.

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