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A NEW DIMENSION IN WOOD UTILIZATION

Although the use of wood for chemicals and energy has a long history, in recent times at least wood utilization in the industrialized countries of the world has been concerned primarily with material applications of wood in solid or fibrous form. The name of this very journal, *Wood and Fiber*, reflects this emphasis.

Dislocations in the cost and availability of fossil hydrocarbons and the petrochemicals derived from them have now focused attention on the potential for using wood at the molecular level for energy and chemicals. While the use of wood for its mechanical and fiber properties will continue to grow, these traditional uses may yet become subordinate to the new uses because of the voracious demands of our society for energy, and the relatively low cost, abundance, and renewability of wood.

For the most part, the use of wood for chemicals and energy is insensitive to species, size, and fiber quality; and a significant part of the body of knowledge traditionally associated with the profession of wood science and technology is not applicable. On the other hand, those aspects of wood science that do apply are probably more essential to proper utilization. A sawmill or furniture plant can operate without a wood technologist; a wood chemicals plant will need professional guidance.

Where will these future professionals for utilization of wood at the molecular level come from? Will they represent an important subspecialty of wood science and technology, or will they come from chemistry and engineering curricula? Early recognition of these new opportunities in wood utilization will permit those wood science and technology programs that are prepared to enjoy a parallel growth.

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