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## ALUMINUM STICKS DO NOT A FOREST MAKE

Each decade seems to spawn its own set of catchwords to reflect the tenor of the times. For the 1980s, wood scientists seem to have adopted "Materials Science" as the mood indicator; and in tune with this mood, the SWST Education Committee released a slide-tape set entitled "Wood Science and Technology—The Materials Science of the Forest Products Industry."

What does "materials science" mean? Webster's Dictionary suggests that it means the science of matter. Does this imply that those who aren't materials scientists are immaterial? What other kind of scientist could one be but a materials scientist? Perhaps the reader thinks that I am being facetious; but I suggest that we have become hung-up on incorporeal jargon and may be losing the substance (or material) of our profession along the way.

I do not suggest that being redundant was the driving force behind choosing the term "materials science," or for SWST adopting the term as our banner—it was simply an unfortunate side effect. But a more serious consequence of such a decision is the direction in which such a slogan moves us. In my view, Wood Science is unique among the so-called "materials" sciences (I'm afraid I'm stuck with the term)—technologies for the most part concerned with metals, plastics, composites, and other categories of materials that are derived from applied technologies of the physical sciences. With few exceptions (and with none so great as for wood), "materials scientists" do not deal with biological variation as the basis for material properties.

The erosion of traditional wood markets by plastic and metal substitutes stems in large part from the inability of the wood industry to recognize the basically *biological* nature of the material and adjust accordingly. A good example can be found in the recent product failures (e.g., plywood, roof trusses) resulting from the wood industries' failure to cope with changing forest management strategies that enhance the levels of juvenile wood in the raw material.

For the 1990s I would suggest that we adopt a slogan like "Biologically Designing Wood for the 21st Century"—or we may not be in business in subsequent decades.

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