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THE SIGNED REVIEW

Starting in October of 1972, the following statement has been included with requests for reviews of manuscripts submitted for publication in *Wood and Fiber*: "It is editorial policy to encourage signed comments in the interest of more generally responsible and accountable reviews. If you wish your review to remain anonymous, please so inform (the editor) in your covering letter with the review." This editorial is intended to inform interested readers, as well as authors and reviewers who have taken part in the signed review system since its inception, of the outcome of the system.

The subject of signed reviews had been discussed earlier in general terms, but was broached publicly by Smith (1971, Letter to the Editor, *Wood and Fiber* 3(1):67), who suggested that since anonymity did not always lead to constructive reviews the journal should institute a signed review system. At the time of the 1972 SWST annual meeting, an editorial goal of instituting signed reviews was made, and the new system started shortly thereafter. Response by reviewers has been excellent; only three out of 106 reviewers have requested—and were given—anonymity. Many of those reviewers who have never given anonymous reviews reinforced their feelings when transmitting their signed comments.

During the period in which signed reviews were received, the proportion of those reviews that offered no helpful criticism at all has been reduced (such vague platitudes as "well written," with few or no sincere comments). Review comments are usually worded in a matter-of-fact way that

one normally associates with those behavior patterns found in mature, adult scientists (see Leopold, A. C. 1973. *Games Scientists Play*. *BioScience* 23(10):590-594). When purely anonymous reviews were received prior to the new system, the occasional reviewer "exercised his ire with uncontrolled exuberance," so that the review comments lost the function intended by the editor when soliciting them—to give constructive criticism that the author could weigh and then use to improve his manuscript.

In many cases, direct communication between authors and reviewers has developed, as a result of the openness of the signed review system. These benefits are inestimable and are alone of such value as to make signed reviews worth while.

As long as reviews are being judged here, in all fairness to those reviewers who requested anonymity, their reviews were of the same responsible caliber as the signed reviews.

Signed reviews have been an overwhelming success for *Wood and Fiber* manuscripts and no changes are contemplated. After this experience, I firmly believe that such a review system should be used for invoking comment on scientific endeavors whenever any organization feels that such comment is necessary—for inhouse, external, or journal manuscript review, research proposals, employment recommendations, etc. Indeed, use of anonymous peer review is counter to responsible scientific, technical, or, indeed, social endeavor.

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