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A BROADER TASK

It is gratifying to read in the SWST Newsletter that the officers of our organization are taking a critical look at what our constitution says about membership requirements. One of the objectives of SWST is to provide an organization to assist the wood scientist and technologist to portray an image of himself, for himself, and for the world; for this purpose professional qualifications are spelled out in the SWST constitution. Periodically professional people should consider the need for redefining their profession to take into account changes in their assignments and in the nature of their work.

This is not an easy task. If it is not undertaken without full consideration of all existing factors and of expected trends, it can do more harm than good. Some of us in SWST can remember the blundering efforts of the Society of American Foresters to make itself into a "simon pure" professional society of forest managers: a decision that had a bearing on the formation of SWST! At the same time it alienated a younger generation of ecology-minded conservationists and tarnished the public image of the forester.

Other professions once highly regarded by the public, such as medical doctors, lawyers, and even clergymen, have lost esteem because rapidly changing problems have not always been kept under control.

The profession of wood science and technology developed greatly during and immediately after World War II, a time of great technological progress. Many who later became founding members of SWST had important professional roles in that effort. Materials for war industries were in short supply, subject to allocation, during that time of crisis. Production schedules

could be met only by considering all possible alternative materials interchangeably. Choices were made on the basis of (1) availability and (2) product performance; not on the basis of personal preference, tradition, or habit. Our Nation's available timber supplies were exploited to their utmost to supply materials for military housing and warehouses, port facilities, ships, aircraft, and shipping containers. Research looked into many possible alternatives for using wood to alleviate other materials in short supply; such as, for example, the possibility of constructing the first large cross-country oil-carrying pipe lines out of molded plywood! Technological progress in wood use was greater than any other time in history.

Fortunately the critical needs for war material have declined. Thoughtful people today are worrying about a whole new array of problems that threaten in another way the prosperity and independence that our Nation has enjoyed for 200 years: Increasing material costs and scarcities, energy problems, environmental problems in processing and use, recyclability; and above all, the ultimate depletion of nonrenewable material resources.

Because wood is the world's major renewable material resource there is bound to develop a new appreciation of the overwhelmingly important role that it will continue to play in our economy. We who claim to know about its utility will be asked many new questions. Shall this Nation turn to burning wood for energy? Shall we make wood into chemicals or possibly into food? Or would it serve man's needs more effectively and more economically for construc-

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tion or transportation uses? Such questions will be asked of us not by today's wood users, but by industrialists and consumers who are today using materials other than wood. In the past we have not given such alternatives thorough technical study, supposing always that economic controls would regulate materials uses. Please note, however, that economics was not one of the criteria for materials use during the big crisis mentioned earlier!

Will we in SWST be courageous enough

and wise enough to anticipate the assignments that lie ahead for us and to organize ourselves for them in a positive and constructive fashion? Are we preparing to assume responsibility as materials scientists of the future, who know how wood can best serve the needs of mankind in a world where all materials are scarce? It is a broader task than we have so far envisioned for ourselves.

H. O. FLEISCHER

2508 Santa Maria Ct.
Middleton, WI 53562