

ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHING

The past few months, this column has reported some of the ways that the AMS is becoming more environmentally responsible. This month we turn our attention to publications. The Committee on Environmental Responsibility and the Publications Commission both report dramatic improvements in the publications process. It's now far simpler and uses much less paper.

Little more than a decade ago, publishing in an AMS journal produced a veritable blizzard of 8.5×11 snowflakes. Authors would mail five copies of an article to AMS, and then possibly mail another five copies a few weeks later if the standards for margins or font size hadn't been followed. Editorial assistants would mail copies to reviewers, who would mail decisions back to the editor, who would mail the author a decision, and the author would most likely have to mail five new copies of a revised article back to the editor. To complete the felling of a personal forest and subsidy of the U.S. Postal Service, the process ended with the snail-mail delivery of a weighty journal to thousands of subscribers and 50 reprints to the author (40 of which are probably still in the author's filing cabinet).

Now, says AMS publications commissioner Dave Jorgensen, "it's possible for a publication to go from a scientist's mind to a published article without a single piece of paper being printed." The author submits their manuscript electronically, including the copyright form. Editors transmit electronic copies to reviewers, who submit reviews electronically; editors send decisions electronically; and most readers will access the article electronically.

Sheridan Press, AMS's printer, has also made great strides in environmental responsibility. For example, their conversion to digital printing reduced the generation of unnecessary paper by 98%, and

their new printing process has virtually eliminated the use of volatile organic compounds. They follow printing best practices, too, recycling all their scrap paper, wooden skids, cardboard, ink, and plates. Replacement equipment is Energy-Star rated.

However, resources are still consumed in the current publications process. Many libraries still prefer bound journals, though the AMS Publications Commission is nudging libraries to go totally paperless themselves. Many scientists like the feel of a piece of paper better than an arrangement of glowing pixels on a computer screen and so will print an article, but some will appreciate the ability to select only articles that they wish to read, as opposed to being presented with 20 others from the same issue. And of course, should a fellow scientist be pondering the article online, they'll be using energy to do so. A typical desktop computer may use 100 watts of energy, and a laptop 25–50 watts, and only a tiny fraction of U.S. power is currently generated from renewables.

Consequently, much of the responsibility for a further "greening" of publications shifts from the AMS and its printer to individual authors and readers. Some questions to ask when writing and submitting an article: Do you use an environmentally thrifty process in drafting your articles, or are you editing your drafts in an "old-school," paper-intensive fashion? Is the power you're using for your computer coming from renewable sources? As a journal reader, are you careful about printing only articles you need to and only printing them once, not each time you want to consult them? Do you share printed copies with colleagues? Are there other ways you can think of to make the production and use of journal articles more environmentally responsible? Please share your thoughts with us at amspubs@ametsoc.org.