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REFEREES

Manuscript referees are almost never acknowledged, and their thanks are imbedded in form letters from the editor. Yet they comprise an important part of the Journal operation, and without them our quality would suffer greatly. Because our referees do perform such an important function, readers might be interested in knowing how they are chosen and how they operate.

Papers are sent to three referees for independent review; R&D Notes receive only one review. We try to maintain a balance between reviewers in industry and those in the academic realm. To expedite the processing of papers, we normally request that reviews be returned within three weeks. Ideally, at least two reviewers will respond in this time, and the editor can rely heavily on their comments in making his decision. If, however, the reviews are contradictory or it is clear that a review has not been thorough, the paper is sent out to additional referees.

Most referees are chosen from our review board of nearly 1,400 members who have volunteered their services and have returned to us forms noting their special areas of interest and competence. All members are filed on an indexing system that allows the matching of interests and papers, the easy removal of reviewers who provide cursory reviews or do not return papers, and the addition of new members. We try to limit our review requests to one review per referee a year, although this limit is not always possible to maintain.

Most authors respond well to referees' comments. They either modify in accordance with the referees' suggestions or rebut in a separate letter of transmittal. Then the editor, and sometimes the Editorial Board, must reconcile conflicting viewpoints.

All in all, the system works well, and the reviews perform the services for which they were designed:

- to suggest links with other work, current or historical,
- to comment on the presentation, length, relevance, etc.,
- to note errors of omission and commission, and
- to evaluate the overall values of the paper to the profession.

As a referee one is fulfilling a professional responsibility; and we of the Journal staff sincerely express our appreciation for the time and effort expended by the large group of men and women who form an invisible but vitally important part of the Journal staff.