



When the Scientific and Political Worlds Collide

Science and politics form a combustible mix. Three recent examples suffice to illustrate this point. The U.S. Administration's policy on limiting the use of federal funds to support research on human embryonic stem cells is clearly colliding with the viewpoint of the larger scientific community and government policies elsewhere in the world. It may be recalled that the U.S. policy limits funding to research only on the handful of stem cell lines in existence prior to Aug. 9, 2001.

Another area where science and politics collide relates to balancing the usual research/peer review/dissemination process with national security concerns. There is a clear lack of consensus here on the best method for controlling information flow in sensitive R&D areas. To complicate matters further, some areas are less transparent than others in terms of their relevance to homeland security. To the extent that we can clearly identify such "negative" technologies, many support the current federal policy of using classification to limit the information flow on them. Others are in support of self-regulation by scientists on the premise that the ultimate responsibility lies with them in ensuring that the technology does not fall into the wrong hands.

The recent discovery of a large pollution plume, roughly the size of the U.S., over the Indian Ocean, has spawned a huge political furor (*The Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2003). Quickly dubbed the Asian Brown Cloud, this scientific discovery has injected new rancor between the U.S. and the developing nations over the causes of global warming—a political fall-out that began with the Kyoto treaty to which the U.S. was a non-sponsor. Political pressure was exerted to such an extent on this atmospheric research that United Nations funding support for it was curtailed. In the meantime, the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) has changed the plume's name to a politically palatable one: Atmospheric Brown Cloud!

In a lighter vein, and on the topic of inter-diffusion of scientific and political jargon, consider what happens when a scientific document is given a Pentagon-like spin:

"When the *command-and-control* site of a pathogen is properly identified, anti-microbial therapy can be initiated with agents that elicit a *shock and awe* response from the foreign invaders. The immune response that is *embedded* within the genetic make-up of the host is triggered. The key then is to be able to effectively *mobilize* the available immune *assets* against the *agents of mass destruction* such that the disease threat is *neutralized* without *collateral damage*."

Finally, this issue of the magazine features the Luminescence and Display Materials Division. LDM appears well poised to take advantage of the tremendous growth opportunities in the solid-state lighting (SSL) and display technology sectors. We hope you enjoy the feature articles we have assembled in this issue on SSL and related topics. Many thanks to the Guest Editor, David Lockwood, for his role in shaping this issue. Stay tuned.

Raj K.

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Editor

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