

## EDITORIAL

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During the past few years, an ever-increasing number of authors have requested to submit their work electronically to *the Journal of Exposure Analysis and Environmental Epidemiology*. This approach has not been discouraged, but in addition, we have always requested that authors provide a hard copy of their manuscript, and one on disk, with a submission letter signed by all the authors. There have been many reasons for this approach: the hard copy and submission letter have been considered proof of the authenticity of the manuscript and its authors; hard copy is often better presented; and it has not always been easy to access files submitted electronically. Indeed, the quality of electronic files of figures and tables has often proved inadequate for publication purposes.

However, electronic communication is now commonplace. All journals must confront it, and adapt it to their needs. Many scientific journals have elected to provide electronic facilities for manuscript submission through the worldwide web. The majority of peer-review journals have been doing so for some time.

To move manuscripts back and forth, we have relied on a much older technology: the post. Although the system is generally reliable, it is either slow (in the case of standard mail) or expensive (in the case of express service). It is also labor-intensive. Our staff must open, address, mail, and track several hundred envelopes each year. Indeed, the increasing costs of our postal services have encouraged the use of electronic communication. In the years prior to the installation of our software, the Internet has developed to a point where a more efficient means of manuscript circulation is now practical.

The *JEAE* has now, in line with other scientific journals, arranged for ScholarOne, to host a manuscript tracking system for us. It is known as Manuscript Central. This tracking system is already being used by over 600 journals.

The new process allows authors to submit manuscripts electronically and facilitates online peer review and tracking. Authors upload manuscripts online and receive an instant confirmation letter. Once a manuscript is submitted, the editor can immediately access it, facilitating quick, effective reviewer assignments.

The greatest benefit of the move to a Web-based system will be a reduction in the time it takes for a manuscript to go from submission to decision. Readers of the journals will benefit because new information may become available in a more timely fashion. Users should also find the new process more convenient. Authors can check the status of their

manuscript at any time of the day, from any place with an Internet connection. Reviewers, associate editors, editors, and administrators can work on journal business wherever they are online. The system tracks late reviews, helps prevent manuscripts from being stalled in the process, and eliminates postal delays, which in the past have been a major deterrent to international authors. The change will create a more efficient, up-to-date journal process from all perspectives.

With far fewer envelopes to manage, our editorial staff will be able to focus on what they do best — ensuring that *JEAE* publishes the highest quality content.

Eventually, we expect this system will decrease the time from submission to decision and from decision to publication. We anticipate gains in speed to be realized through a reduction in the amount of time manuscripts spend in transit and through more efficient circulation. For example, we anticipate that Manuscript Central will help identify available reviewers more rapidly through an advance-notification function, thus expediting this sometimes-lengthy process.

Authors may begin submitting manuscripts to *JEAE* using Manuscript Central's Web-based system on October 1, 2004. By October 1, 2005 all authors will be required to submit manuscripts in this manner and can reach the site at: <http://jeae.manuscriptcentral.com>. When submitting a manuscript electronically, authors should first check to see if they are already registered on the website. To do this, you should click on the "check for existing account" button, and follow the on-screen instructions. If you are not registered, you should click on the "create a new account" button on the login screen and, again, follow the on-screen instructions. If you know your login details, use your User ID and Password to log in. The instructions to authors are straightforward, but detailed, and must be followed carefully. Failure to do so will prevent successful submission of your manuscript. Particular attention is required when submitting figures. It is preferable that these are originated in high-resolution format for publication purposes. A second version should be prepared for peer review in a low-resolution format, which will help keep the files small when they are sent out for review. Thought must be given to the layout of electronic text, proper English usage and correct spelling, and the use of paragraphs in this format. It is hoped that authors will try to maintain the same (if not increase) standards of presentation when submitting electronically, as they have used with hard copy.

On receiving a manuscript onto the website, the Editor-in-Chief's Office will communicate with the author by e-mail,

providing a reference number for their paper. The Editor-in-Chief and Associate Editors will also invite reviewers, by e-mail, to review the manuscript on the website. The system will be protected by passwords and will therefore be secure. Only the authors, editors, and reviewers dealing with your manuscript will be able to read it on the website. An author will be able to watch the progress of their manuscript, and will receive communications at regular intervals by e-mail from the editor responsible for it. This, therefore, requires the author to submit an e-mail address, otherwise submission of a manuscript will not be possible.

As we begin to use this tracking system, no doubt, there will be a few glitches as we set parameters and learn how to use the system. We anticipate this system to be running

smoothly within 6 to 9 months after its implementation begins, so meanwhile please bear with us.

We are determined to provide as rapid a service as possible when handling authors' manuscripts. The peer review process for *JEAE* has long been an international affair, only hindered by the great distances manuscripts have traveled, until now, for appraisal. Electronic manuscript tracking should improve the efficiency of this process. It is a significant challenge for the *JEAE* editorial team, but one that we are now ready to undertake. We look forward to hearing from you — electronically.

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*Editor-in-Chief*