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As Ethics is a Core Attribute of Science, So Geoethics Must Be at the Core of Geoscience

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Abstract Text:

The daily quest of a geoscientist is to seek reliable information about Earth: its history, nature, materials, processes, resources and hazards. In science, reliable information is based on reproducible observations (scientific facts), and includes an estimate of uncertainty. All geoscientists share that basic quest, regardless of whether they wear a lab coat, business suit or field boots at work. All geoscientists also share a responsibility to serve society – the same society that invested in science and education, and thereby enabled the development of geoscience as well as the commercial ventures that utilize geoscience. What does society expect in return for that investment? It just wants the truth, along with a clear indication of the uncertainty. Society needs reliable geoscience information and expertise so that it can make good, informed decisions about resources, risk and our shared environment. Unreliable geoscience information, if represented as valid, might do irreparable harm.

The authors represent the International Association for Promoting Geoethics (IAPG, www.geoethics.org), which seeks to develop and advance geoethics worldwide. Geoethics is based on the moral imperative for geoscientists to use our knowledge and expertise about Earth for the benefit of humankind. Informed by the geologic record of the intertwined history of life and our planet, that moral imperative extends beyond our time, our culture, and even our species. Ultimately, Earth is a small lifeboat in space. Geoscientists form the essential interface between our human society and Earth, and we must act for the health and benefit of both. Einstein wrote, “Truth is what stands the test of experience.” If geoscientists are unwilling to engage the public and to speak the truth about Earth, who else will assume that role? The challenges we face together – resources, energy, potable water, soil conservation, sea-level rise – are too serious for geoscientists to be mute. Voices motivated by narrow self-interest might fill the void left by our indifference. Our children’s children’s children will expect us to have done our job in our time: to be honest, to be good scientists, to provide reliable expertise about Earth, to help reorient society toward sustainability, and to pass on a healthy ecosystem to those who follow.

Topic Selection: What it Means to be a Geoscientist: Defining a Common Identity for the Public and Profession

Title: As Ethics is a Core Attribute of Science, So Geoethics Must Be at the Core of Geoscience

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