Editorial

50 Years Past and the Future

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This issue of the Geotechnical Testing Journal is dedicated to the 50th Anniversary of Committee D-18 on Soil and Rock of ASTM. An anniversary, particularly a golden one, is a time for reflection. Articles on the history and other accomplishments are included in a special section of this issue. Accomplishments of this Committee are impressive and have contributed significantly to the practice of geotechnical engineering worldwide. All who have contributed to these accomplishments over the years have a right to share in the glory of this occasion.

It occurred to me that many of the GTJ readers may not be members of ASTM Committee D-18 and may not be aware of how and why ASTM standards or publications, such as the Special Technical Publications (STPs), come about. For those, I would like to share some of my observations as an active member for about 20 years.

Committees are the fundamental elements of ASTM. Committee membership consists of people with all sorts of backgrounds who work for industry, government agencies, or educational institutions. A balanced representation among producers, users, and general interest participants is the goal of every committee. Each committee focuses on some specific area, for example, D-18 on Soil and Rock, D-35 on Geotextiles, etc. Within each committee, there are a number of subcommittees with narrower areas of interest, for example, Subcommittee D18.02 on Sampling and Related Field Testing for Soil Investigations, D18.05 on Structural Properties of Soils, D18.09 on Soil Dynamics, and so forth. There also are some administrative subcommittees that provide management and "housekeeping" functions for the committees. Overall direction of a Committee is provided by the Committee Chairmen and the Executive Subcommittee. A complete list of subcommittees, officers, and subcommittee chairmen of Committee D-18 is given on the back cover.

Committees function quite autonomously, choosing what topics to work on, deciding on symposia topics and schedules, and so forth. Symposia on specific topics are scheduled once each year or so for the purposes of information dissemination and for gathering information that might lead to new standards. Results of symposia are usually published in a bound volume referred to as a Special Technical Publication (STP). The major activity of the committee centers around developing and maintaining standards. Subcommittees have the responsibility for drafting the standards. Drafts are balloted within the subcommittee and redrafted, as needed, until all negative votes are resolved. Then the balloting takes place at the committee level. Again, all negative votes must be resolved. Finally, balloting takes place at the society level. At this level too, all negative votes must be resolved. Some standards, which may be controversial, may take many years to make it into the *Annual Book of ASTM Standards.* Once a standard is approved, it must be either reapproved or revised every five years. With fast changing technology, the standards maintenance and reapproval functions consume as much subcommittee activity as developing new standards.

The bulk of the work is done by individual subcommittee members or task groups of two or three individuals. Nearly all work is done without financial compensation, except that employers frequently will allow some work time for this type activity. Discussions with subcommittee and committee membership and resolution of negative votes usually take place at one of the two yearly meetings. In between those, much is done by mail and telephone. Participating in the meetings helps keep me informed of new technical developments and is fun and challenging.

ASTM also maintains a permanent staff at their offices in Philadelphia. These staff assist the committees and subcommittees with the details of balloting, arranging for symposia, publications, and so forth. They are well qualified, and their support is a key element in the success that ASTM enjoys. The liaison between committee members and the staff is provided by a staff manager.

Anniversaries also are occasions for looking into the future. What changes and challenges are in the future for Committee D-18? We can be sure that there will be many of both. We will witness an increased need for up-to-date standards and will be facing increased competition with other standards making bodies, worldwide. We also will face competition with other technical activities for getting younger people involved in the standardization process. Much of our future efforts will be brought about because the computer is now becoming used with increasing frequency in soil and rock testing for both control of the test and results presentation, that is, totally automated systems. The nature of the standards may change significantly because of this. We will also see the computer used to write standards by use of "expert systems." The latter would help tremendously in expediting the process and in unifying the standards from one committee to another. (The reader is referred to the Aug. 1986 issue of ASTM's *Standardization News* for more discussion on the future of standardization.)

The past has been impressive and the future looks challenging

and exciting for Committee D-18. People are the key to the future success of the committee. You should consider actively participating in Committee D-18. Besides contributing to better standards, you will have a technically and professionally rewarding experience.

In closing, let me remind you that in the Sept. issue, I invited the readers to comment on the subject of membrane penetration in triaxial testing. Those comments should be sent to me before the end of December. Hope you had a good year and that 1987 and the future see many of your aspirations realized.

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