

## Security: So What's the Big Deal?

Security on the Internet is one of those conversations whose term has expired. Yes, there are still reports of piracy of intellectual property and even financial property instigated by hackers and evil doers. However, I am not convinced that any great harm has been done to mankind because of these intrusions on scientific communication.

This insecurity about security reminds me of pioneer days in the American West. Most people stayed in their comfortable homes in Philadelphia, drinking tea out of fine china cups, while a few brave souls trod barefoot over the Great Plains to reach the promised land. There wasn't much security in walking over Donner Pass, but somebody had to do it. Now we don't think anything about moving from coast to coast because it

is secure.

Where is the security in basic research labs? Colleagues meet and discuss their work. Scientists report their work in progress at meetings, where feedback is solicited. Interim reports are submitted to funding agencies and journals as work in progress. Reports are left in unsecured files and on researchers' desks. Reports are photocopied and faxed by clerical staff who have no stake in the proprietary nature of the work. The postal workers and express mailers handle the data and manuscript in its various stages. I won't even mention the breach of confidentiality that happens too often in the review process. Why are these not seen as places of possible insecurity?

Psychologists contend that during the 1st

stages of change we are shocked by the news of the change and become fearful. Transmitting manuscripts on the Internet requires a change in the way we think. It is the Federal Express of the 1990s and the pioneers of the 1840s. Oddly enough, many of us want this to work, but we are stuck in the fear stage as we face our 1st big river with our horses and wagon. It's time to leave the extra baggage behind and figure out how to make this work. ●

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