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Explore the experience of this year's virtual PEERS Conference

Since impacts from the pandemic took hold this past March, we've all begun to truly appreciate safe in-person interaction with others. Whether it's a trip to the grocery, visiting elderly parents, instructing students, or networking with colleagues, no direct contact is simple, so we've learned to negotiate virtual gatherings in a way we never dreamed would be important at the start of 2020.

A conference is one particular event that's changed (and still changing) since the pandemic began. These gatherings thrive on development of new ideas and professional networks through interaction with others. So, when TAPPI began to postpone or cancel its major events like PaperCon, it (like many organizations) began to explore the emerging world of the virtual conference.

This year's Pulping, Engineering, Environmental, Recycling and Sustainability ([PEERS](#)) Conference will be TAPPI's first major virtual event. Held online this November 2-4, the conference will be a mixture of the familiar and the unique. The conference is co-located with the International Bioenergy and Bioproducts Conference ([IBBC](#)) during those dates as usual. Many prospective attendees may be wondering what to expect from this virtual event, so we'll take a look at what they will experience.

Familiar topics, different experience

As with the live conferences in years past, the PEERS opening session on November 2 begins with a welcome from the conference chair. This year, Danny Tandra of Clyde Industries will provide a pre-recorded welcome to participants. Then, the Engineering & Pulp Manufacture Division Awards will be announced, and winners of the major three awards will make taped remarks. To better accommodate participants in different time zones, the conference starts at 11am ET each day and goes to 6:30pm ET on Monday and Tuesday, November 2 and 3, and to 2pm ET on Wednesday, November 4. IBBC sessions are at roughly the same times on November 3 and 4.



PEERS keynote, Steve Voorhees, CEO of WestRock.



IBBC keynote, Dr. Richard Hess, Director of the Energy Environment Directorate of the Idaho National Laboratory.

Awards are followed by the much-anticipated PEERS keynote speaker, Steve Voorhees, CEO of WestRock, in a pre-recorded speech. Likewise, the IBBC keynote, Dr. Richard Hess, Director of the Energy Environment Directorate of the Idaho National Laboratory, will start the day on November 3. This year, as previous PEERS attendees will appreciate, the IBBC keynote doesn't coincide with the State of the Industry presentation. And, the IBBC keynote session this year will be held as a single track, allowing attendees of both events to attend without missing out on other technical sessions.

As for sessions, attendees familiar with the [PEERS program](#) will find that the content and format are the same, including the usual six concurrent tracks—Pulping & Bleaching; Environmental; Recycling; Nonwoods; Engineering, Reliability, Corrosion & Materials; and Energy, Recovery, Lime Kiln, and Recast. Including the [IBBC program](#), there are more than 30 sessions this year.

Through the conference portal, attendees will view pre-recorded videos from the presenter in the original format, like PowerPoint. During the session, attendees may participate in a side chat via computer link with the speaker and other participants. There is also a live Q&A at the end of the presentation for more live feedback and networking.

opportunities. In addition, live session moderators introduce speakers and keep session timing and Q&A on track.

Among other traditional conference offerings, the panel discussion may become a combination of virtual and pre-recorded content. And, the Hot Topics “Breakfast” is now held on Monday and Tuesday around noon, with seven topics in separate live discussion groups each day led by experts. There’s also a Virtual Exhibit Hall that is open throughout the day for attendees to live chat with exhibitors, and there is even a Virtual PaperChase [Fun Run/Walk](#) to support the TAPPI Engineering Scholarship Fund.

Practical benefits of a virtual setting

If a virtual PEERS and IBBC this year sounds intriguing, keep in mind there are many distinct and motivating factors for attending. For one, the [registration rate](#) is extremely reasonable, especially combined with the absence of travel costs. Also, registrants gain access to recordings and proceedings post-event at no additional charge.

In addition, because the event is virtual, you won’t have to choose between which concurrent session to attend because you can listen to the recorded session(s) you otherwise might have missed—and at your convenience. You also have access to some virtual bells and whistles, like a conference platform

dashboard with links to the full program, exhibit, and breakdown of conference tracks. Presenters can also take polls during a session and share the results. And, let’s face it, you can take business casual to a whole new level and not feel guilty for checking messages during a session!

Still, a virtual conference can’t replace some of the tangible benefits of live event, like seeing long-time colleagues or meeting new ones face-to-face at coffee breaks and happy hours, but TAPPI really encourages reaching out through chats to gain contact information for one-on-one discussions. Also, as PEERS and IBBC continue to develop in the coming weeks, TAPPI is constantly looking at new options for keeping participants engaged and connected in this virtual new conference world.

Though they will be different, this year’s IBBC and PEERS promise to be a unique experience that many industry professionals will embrace not only due to the content, but also the time flexibility and cost-effectiveness as regards registration and travel. We hope this opens the door to new participants across the country and around the world. For detailed information on the event and virtual experience, visit the [website](#) or contact Lisa Stephens at TAPPI, lstephens@tappi.org. **TJ**

TAPPI

**IBBC
2020**

International
Bioenergy &
Bioproducts
Conference

November 2-4, 2020

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