

Understanding the number of copies of ethics applications required by faculties of medicine

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Most ethics applications to university faculties of medicine require the submission of several copies of the application for review by a research ethics board (REB). We reviewed the Web sites of each university in Canada that had a faculty of medicine or equivalent. The number of copies required for submission of an application was recorded. If the number of copies required was not indicated on the Web site, we phoned or emailed a contact person to confirm how many copies were required for submission to their institution.

We show in Table 1 the east-to-west gradient across the country with respect to the number of copies of applications required by REBs. This gradient has been demonstrated in other conditions and situations (quality of politicians, access to screech, price of smoked salmon and so forth). We also show the association between the number of copies of ethics submissions required by REBs and the annual cut of trees in each province.

A significant correlation ($p = 0.016$; Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.75) was found between the number of copies the REB required and the longitude of the location of the faculty of medicine. There was also a significant correlation

($p = 0.041$; Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.649) between the number of copies the REB required and the annual cut of trees for each province that has a medical school.

These are startling findings that may point to a tacit or not-so-tacit agreement between the forestry industry and REBs. Is it the job of ethics boards to create demand for paper to support the forest industry? These authors would suggest not. Such an association must stop, and we would suggest that any and all communication between REBs and the forest industry cease. The authors hope that by uncovering this startling break of ethical behaviour that they will not suffer any delays or undue rejections by REBs in the future.

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References

1. *The state of Canada's forests*. Ottawa: Natural Resources Canada; 2002. Available: www.nrcan.gc.ca/cfs-scf/national/what-quoi/sof/sof02/statistics_e.html (accessed 2003 Nov 13).
2. Canadian city and town geographic coordinates. Infinite Gravity Data Services [Web site]. Available: www.infinitegravity.ca/mapdata/canada.asp (accessed 2003 Oct 21).

Table 1: Comparison by province of mean number of copies of ethics applications required by research ethics boards (REBs) with annual cut of wood and longitude

Province	No. of copies required by REBs in each faculty of medicine†	Annual cut of round wood per year (million m ³) ¹ for 1999	Longitude of faculty of medicine ² †
British Columbia	20	71.7	123.40
Alberta	17	27.3	113.70
Saskatchewan	12	0.7	106.39
Manitoba	15	9.6	97.70
Ontario	13	25.0‡	78.32
Quebec	13	58.2	72.75
Nova Scotia	14	6.7	63.31
Newfoundland	11	2.7	52.41

†Mean numbers are provided for the number of copies and longitude of multiple facilities of medicine in a single province.
‡Estimated.