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EDITOR'S NOTE:

We're All In This Together



One of the iconic images of the 'Sixties was the view of earth from space, courtesy of the Apollo Program's voyagers to the moon. Common reactions included the perception of earth's, and therefore our, vulnerability in contrast to the enormity of the universe.

Among other resting places, one of those images found a home on the front of the first (1968) [Whole Earth Catalog](#).

References to the commonality of human existence began popping up in other ways and contexts as well, such as Marshal McLuhan's realization of a modern, electronically linked media world as a "[global village](#)."

But the concept that all resource issues are global has never really taken off. Natural resources are still thought of as national rather than global resources, even when they are located in only a few nations, and pollution, even when it travels across borders, is not yet the subject of a well-developed body of defensive international law. As the population of the planet continues to grow, so will the stresses on natural resources and the environment. Unless we devise ways to deal with the tensions that will inevitably result, we're in for a rough ride.

I last touched on this concern in the Spring of 2007, in what I simply titled [The Environmental Issue](#). If you have time to read it, I think that it's still provocative. In particular, you might find interesting the Feature Article, [Property Rights in the Age of Global Warming: A Reexamination](#), in which I suggest (among other things) that the geographic scope of political systems should map to the borders of the resources that they relate to.

For example, if a river basin includes two countries, then the two countries should legislate jointly in relation to it. Air pollution and green house gasses by definition would be globally regulated. Today, these are treaty matters, and agreement requires the willingness and consent of both parties. But if the legislative boundaries were redrawn, the whole game would change.

Which brings us to this issue. This time around, I focus on the fragility of the planet, and the ways in which we can make ourselves more, or less, vulnerable to

catastrophe. In my Editorial, I focus on the danger that we will put too much faith on the ability of science to help us get more from less, a belief that encourages us to underestimate the need for more empirically proven and testable techniques, such as conservation. I also note the importance of developing standards now, rather than later, that will allow us to translate the carrying capacity of the earth into sustainable annual consumption and output limits.

In my Feature Article, I turn to a different type of sustainability standard that relates to another opportunity that the human race is actively exploiting to imperil its future. That opportunity is to put all of our eggs into that single information and communications technology basket we know and love as the Internet. Today's cyber security efforts on the private sector side are not only inadequate, but primarily concerned with protecting financial and personal data from theft and misuse. At the same time, everything upon which society now depends – the financial system, transportation and so on – relies on the Internet to operate. Worse, with the rise of the cloud services computing model, we are now pushing not only our software but our data into service provider data farms that will inevitably grow to enormous size.

If this process continues, what happens when a terrorist or a national enemy takes out, not a government facility, but several data farms at once? Unless our current IT rules change dramatically, the answer could be a catastrophe beyond what you are likely to have ever imagined. Happily, the Obama administration last week proposed legislation that incorporates many of the recommendations that I make in this article.

With this month's Standards Blog entry, I examine the less apocalyptic subject of regional and national government intellectual property rights policies, which is currently a very hot topic in the European Union. Recently, the EU responded to stiff industry pressure when it stepped back from the very aggressive definition of "open standards" that had been included in the first version of the European Interoperability Framework. But the United Kingdom (and perhaps other member states), are opting to hold the line by adopting an aggressive definition of their own, and the battle front has now shifted.

I once again follow with a chapter from my cybersecurity-focused thriller titled *The Alexandria Project*. This time, I take a step back to the Prologue, because the setting for the action is the type of cyber secure data center that I describe in the Feature Article as being essential for the protection of our most important IT resources. If you enjoy it, there's no need to wait until the next issue of *Standards Today* to see what happens next, because you can find the rest of the book [here](#).

The Consider This essay that as usual closes this issue examines another way in which we seem to delight in pulling the rug out from under our own feet – the inflation, and inevitable bursting, of investment bubbles.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue. But either way, it's always great to hear what you think. Let me know, why don't you? My email address is andrew.updegrove@gesmer.com Wording

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