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DEFECTIVE BOOKS

by *Sandra K. Paul* (SKP Associates)

The focus for this column is a letter from Rosann Bazirjian (Syracuse University) about "defective books," which appeared somewhere in the depths of the November, 1990 issue of *Against the Grain* and more prominently in "The Charleston Advisor" column of the February, 1991 issue. Rosann noted in her letter that she had tracked the defects in books received between 10/89 and 2/90. Katina agreed that she's receiving a lot more "flimsily bound" books and asked for input from publishers, vendors, librarians and others. I hope she received some from the rest of you; here's mine.

Firstly, I wonder how many librarians know that publishers do NOT manufacture books. Their position is unlike those in most industries, in that publishers develop product content, have their product made by outsiders, and then warehouse and sell it themselves. AND, they develop lots and lots of new products each year, each of which is a unique entity, possibly similar, but not identical to some product they offered in the past. All of this has implications for quality control.

Secondly, except for some who publish mass market paperbacks, publishers do not intentionally try to make "disposable" books. However, as you all know, there are degrees of quality of paper and binding that run from "two-time use before it falls apart or turns yellow" to books which can last forever. A publisher's decision on the quality of paper and the

type of binding for a book is based on the expected readers of that title. Publishers know that multiple readers in a school or library are harder on the binding than a family and friends sharing an individual purchase. The question is — are there standards they can follow? AND, if they do, how can they tell you, their library customers, that a specific book DOES meet those standards?

PAPER

In 1984 American National Standard ANSI/NISO Z39.48, "Permanence of Paper For Printed Library Materials," was approved. It covered only uncoated paper and called for the use of paper which is acid-free, free of other yellowing additives, and paper that meets certain strength tests. That standard identified types of books which qualify for permanent paper and advocated publishers' use of an infinity symbol in a circle in their ads, promotion pieces, and in the book itself to identify titles with this type of paper.

In 1989, in conjunction with the required five-year review, each ANSI standard must undergo, and

because testing had been underway in those intervening years, a revision of the standard was completed. It covered coated, as well as uncoated paper, and specified additional tests for longevity. Balloting of the NISO membership on that revision ended March 11, 1991. It's assumed that either that version, or a slight modification, will become the new ANSI/NISO standard.

However, many publishers have been reluctant to use the infinity symbol, making it more difficult than it should be for librarians seeking books on permanent paper to know they have one.

Those publishers' logic runs like this. "I can control the paper in my first printing and I WILL meet the ANSI/NISO standard, for sure. However, if this book's sales 'take off,' I'll be forced to use whatever paper the printer has available, and it may not meet the standard. Does it pay to say to my library customers that I can only guarantee that the first printing meets the standard? Can I use the infinity symbol in the book and in my ads to represent that type of conformity?"

Do librarian readers of *Against the Grain* have an answer for these publishers? If so, please send it to me and I'll be certain it reaches NISO during the revision period. Send your thoughts to Sandy Paul, SKP Associates, 160 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010 or fax to 212/989-7542.

BINDING

Binding standards exist for textbooks. They were developed by a joint committee of publishers, book manufacturers and state-level elementary/high school administrators. The Library Binding Institute advocates standards for the binding of library materials by librarians. Neither type of standard offers the publisher a method for identifying books meeting the binding standard in their ads, promotional materials, or in the book itself.

However, in the near future there will be an ANSI/NISO standard for "Library Binding and Library Prebound Books," which we hope will cover the type of books to be bound and a symbol to identify those which meet the standard. The proposal to establish a Standards Committee to develop such a standard was approved by the NISO

membership in a ballot that ended December 31, 1991. The Standards Committee has been designated "ZZ" (without the assumption that their work will put them to sleep, we hope). Members are now being appointed and we know that librarians will be included.

Until that standard exists, I hope that Rosann Bazirjian and other

Against the Grain readers who have identified problems with the quality of the books they buy will alert the books' publishers. As was stated at the start of this article, publishers don't intentionally make defective books. Often book manufacturers send those copies which received the closest scrutiny in their manufacture to the publishing house as samples. Rarely do publishers buy (or even open) their own books in bookstores or libraries. If you receive a defective book, here's the procedure I recommend. Look up the publisher listing in *Literary Market Place*. Send your analysis of the problem with the book to the person shown as President, Publisher, or Chief Executive Officer in that listing. As someone who worked in publishing for over 10 years, I bet you start receiving thank you notes. You may also start seeing better quality books from those publishing houses!

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